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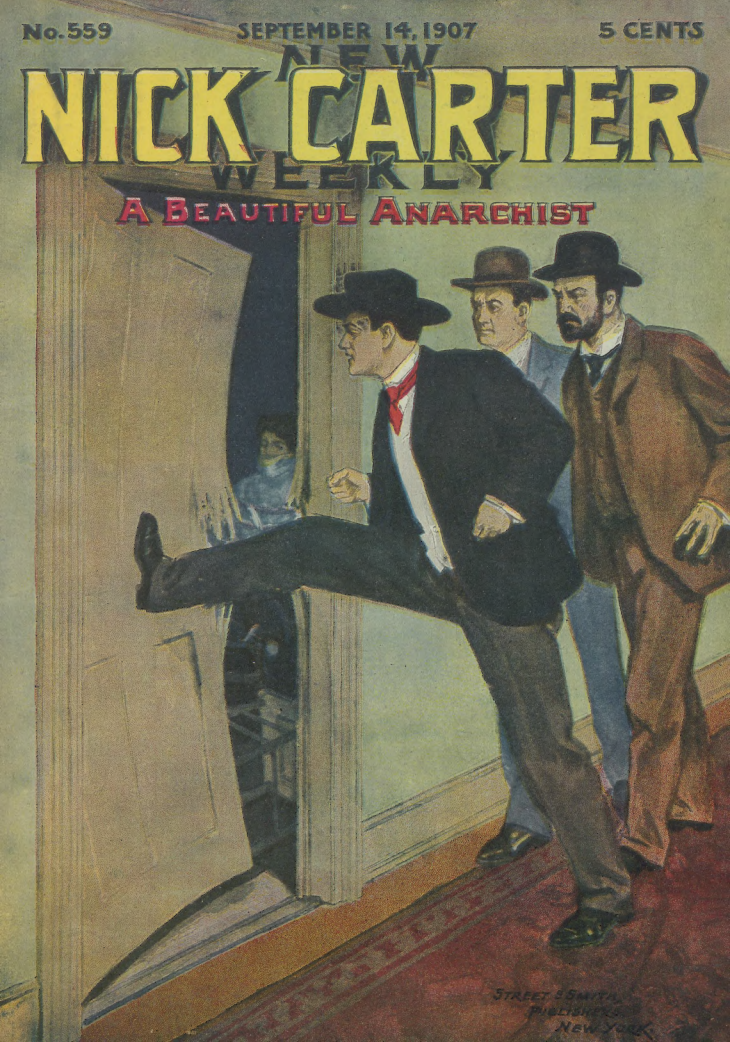
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A BEAUTIFUL ANARCHIST



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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A Beautiful Anarchist;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S BRAVEST ACT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FROM A NIHILIST.

"A man to see you, sir," said Joseph, entering the detective's study after a discreet rap against the panel of the door; and when Nick raised his eyebrows in surprise at the unusual form of announcement, Joseph added:

"He is evidently a messenger for another person, sir; a servant, I should say he is."

"Where is he?" asked the detective.

"In the reception-room, sir."

"I will go down in a moment."

Later, when Nick entered the reception-room, he found himself confronted by a short, stolid individual whom Joseph's words had quite thoroughly described. Stolidity, imperturbability, dogged obstinacy, and not overmuch intelligence were the noticeable characteristics of his face.

"Well, sir?" said the detective, as the man came toward him when he entered the room. He held a sealed envelope in his hand, which, however, he did not at once offer to the detective.

"I was directed first to make sure that I was addressing Mr. Nicholas Carter," he said, in a curiously impersonal voice, which was as nearly devoid of expression as a voice could be.

"I am he," replied the detective. "I am Nick Carter."

"The detective?"

"Yes."

"I was instructed to put this note into your hands, sir, and to await your reply."

He extended the envelope as he spoke, and Nick took it and broke the seal. Then he read:

"The writer of this letter appeals to Nick Carter in the name of humanity. The writer is Ivan Dovanief, a Russian expatriate, exiled from his own country because of political opinions which have never yet taken the form of offenses more than the mere expression of opinions. With that much of explanation, I will proceed in the first person.

"I crave your indulgence, sir, in the reading of what I have to say here, and in my personal behalf thereafter, if I am fortunate enough to appeal to a responsive impulse in your kind heart."

The detective stopped reading in the middle of the letter, and raised his eyes to the man who waited before him.

"Do you know the contents of this letter?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Who wrote it? I have read the name, but who is Ivan Dovanief?"

"He is my master, sir."

"You are also a Russian?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Peter Petronoff."

"You are valet to Ivan Dovanief?"

"I am everything, sir. I am his servant."

Nick returned to the letter.

"I have been informed," the detective read on, "that you are quite familiar with Russian affairs and that you have had considerable experience in my unhappy country; that you know a great deal about the class of people I represent, who are variously called terrorists, revolutionaries, anarchists, and nihilists. If that is true, you will understand thoroughly what I will have to say here.

"I am a nihilist—a terrorist, if you will; I am certainly a revolutionary; but after doing everything in my power for years to aid my unfortunate countrymen in their struggle for liberty, I have at last abandoned hope and have put aside all thought of further struggle against the powers that rule in Russia.

"In pursuit of that end, I have found my way to America, under disguise. I have claimed this country as an asylum. I have tried to hide here, and to make my life so orderly that no suspicion of revolutionary activity on my part could attach to me. In a word, I have given up all association with that past of mine, and now I seek only an opportunity to enjoy the rest of my life in peace and quiet. I have sworn never to raise my hand against Russia again, and never even to return there.

"But, notwithstanding that, I am a hunted man. There is not a moment when I am free from espionage of some sort; and now, within the last forty-eight hours, my life has been twice attempted.

"And that, sir, brings me directly to the purpose of this letter.

"I seek your protection. I ask for your advice in order that I may escape from these enemies who would murder me. The danger I fear is so imminent that now I dare not even venture abroad. I am ashamed to confess it, but I dare not go to you, whom I desire to see so very much, lest I be shot down in the street while on my way there, or death meets me on the way, in one form or another.

"My servant Peter, who takes this letter to you, will reply to any and all questions you may care to ask him, and he will return to conduct you to my house—the house where I live and am in hiding—at any hour to-morrow morning that you may fix.

"I ask you, in the name of humanity, to consent to come here to the place where I am living, to see me and talk with me, in order that you may advise me how best to avoid the dangers that threaten me on every side. If you will do so, it will confer a great boon upon one who is undergoing great mental suffering. I should add that I have a wife and daughter who will also thank you if you will consent to visit me.

"Your humble and obedient servant,

"IVAN DOVANIEF.

"Postscriptum: I have thought of appealing to the police of your city, and have written a letter, doing so; but I have not sent the letter yet, and shall not until my servant returns with your answer to this one. I. D."

Again the detective raised his eyes to the face of the man before him.

"Where does your master live?" he asked.

"He is living in that part of the city which you call the 'East Side,'" replied the man.

"What is the name of the street?"

"I have forgotten it, sir."

"What is that? Do you expect that you will induce me to go to your master by telling me lies?"

"My master's instructions, sir, are that each time I leave the street in which we live I shall forget its name and not remember it until I return to it. I try to obey his orders, sir, and so I have for the time forgotten the name of the street."

"How long has your master been in this country?"

"Four months."

"Did you come here with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"He refers here to his wife and daughter; are they with him at the house where you would take me?"

"They are, sir."

"Did they come to this country with him?"

"No, sir. They came more than a year ago."

"To prepare a place for him when he should follow?"

"No, sir; to escape persecution over there. At that time my master had no intention of coming here at all. He intended to remain there and to continue his fight against the government to the end of his life. But there was one there who betrayed him—who accused him of being mixed up in a plot against the life of the czar. It was really a plot with which he had nothing to do and of which he had no knowledge, but an accusation of that sort, in Russia, amounts to conviction, particularly if the man accused is known to have revolutionary tendencies."

"I know that," said the detective.

"And so, sir, my master fled the country."

"Yes?"

"We went first to Switzerland; thence to France; thence to England, and from there we came here."

"Where Madam Dovanief and her daughter were already awaiting you?"

"Where madam and her daughter already were, al-

though they were not awaiting us. They had no knowledge of our coming until our arrival."

"Four months ago?"

"Four months ago; a trifle more than that, to be exact."

"Did he not apprise them of his coming, even by letter?"

"No, sir."

"But he did know where to find them when he arrived here; eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You speak English perfectly; your master writes it perfectly. You have both been in this country before?"

"No, sir. We learned the language by studying it."

"Your pronunciation is perfect; your master's script is perfect."

"Thank you, sir."

"Your language is not the language of a servant, neither is your manner."

"I was not always a servant."

"You are sufficiently aware of the contents of this letter to know that your master desires me to go to him at the house where he is living, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that you are to guide me to him in case I consent to go there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know when he fixes the time?"

"He told me, to-morrow morning."

"Why not to-night? Why defer it until to-morrow morning, if he is in momentary danger of assassination?"

"I do not know, sir, save that he thought it unwise to request you to go to him to-night. It is already five o'clock. I suppose he did not wish to intrude upon you unnecessarily. But if you prefer——"

"No. I will go to him to-morrow morning, as he requests. You may call here for me at eight o'clock in the morning."

"Very well, sir. You wish me to take that message to him?"

"Yes."

"Then I will be here at eight in the morning to conduct you to him."

"Yes; and tell him, also, that since he has chosen to refer to his wife and daughter in his communication, I would be glad if he would give me the opportunity of meeting them, also, at our interview."

"I will do so, sir."

Nick watched the man take his departure, with some misgivings, for instinctively he did not trust the fellow. He could not have told why—but the fact remained that he did not.

CHAPTER II.

A BEAUTIFUL NIHILIST.

When the servant of Ivan Dovanief left him, the detective returned slowly to his study.

He could not have told, if any one had asked him, why the odd letter he had received from the Russian should have interested him at all or why he should have deemed it worthy of notice; still less could he have explained the unaccountable interest he felt in the man who posed as a servant, who had the outward appearance of a boor, but who spoke and acted like an educated gentleman.

But things Russian had always interested the detective. The readers of the Nick Carter histories will recall the fact that he has had many adventures in that country among the nihilists, the terrorists, and other political offenders.

He did not, however, recall the name of Ivan Dovanief as one that was at all familiar to him or which suggested any recollection of his past experiences in Russia.

But the detective had a friend in New York at that time who was then, and is now, associated with the United States Secret Service, but who, prior to his services in this country, had been employed at other times by the French Government and as a member of the Russian secret police.

As he seated himself in his chair in the study, he recalled the name of Malet, and presently drawing the telephone across the desk toward him, he asked for the number which would put him in communication with his friend.

"I was wondering if you had anything in particular to occupy your time to-night, Malet," he said, when connection was made and they mutually understood who was talking.

"No," replied the secret service official, "for once in my career I have an idle night on my hands. Why?"

"Because if you have nothing better to do, I would be glad if you would come up here and spend an hour or two with me in my study."

"Delighted to do it, old chap. At what hour?"

"Why not come now and have dinner with me?"

"I'll do that, too."

"Good. Then come right away."

And so it happened that when dinner was over that evening, Nick Carter and his old friend of the Russian police were closeted in the former's study with their after-dinner coffee and a box of cigars, and when the latter were alight and the two men had disposed themselves comfortably, Nick remarked:

"I suppose it is rather ungenerous of me, Malet, to admit that I had an ulterior motive in asking you to come here to-night; or to put it more plainly, I doubt if you would have been suggested to my thoughts, had not a letter come up this afternoon concerning which I believe you can give me some information."

Malet laughed softly as he replied:

"I guessed that much, Nick, old chap. You and I haven't much time to think about social things, and it is sufficient to say that when either of us seeks the other there is a suggestion of our work behind it."

"I want to know," said the detective, "if you have any recollection, dating from your Russian experiences, of a revolutionist, a terrorist, or nihilist, by the name of —or at least who wears the name of—Ivan Dovanief."

Malet started slightly and the lids of his eyes narrowed with sudden earnestness. He leaned forward a little toward the detective, and instead of replying to the implied question uttered the one word:

"Why?"

For reply, Nick tossed the strange letter across the table to his friend, who read it through to the end without comment and also without visible change of expression, and then instead of replying to Nick's question he asked one of his own:

"Did you reply to this letter, Nick?" he said.

"I sent a verbal reply."

"By the messenger who delivered it?"

"Yes."

"May I ask what name he gave you?"

"Peter Petronoff."

Malet shook his head and murmured:

"That name, at least, is unknown to me."

"What about the other one?" asked Nick.

"Oh, that is known to me, all right enough."

"Who, then, is this Ivan Dovanief?"

"If it's all the same to you, Nick, I'd rather not answer that question just yet. I'd like to go a little deeper into details of the present circumstances before doing so."

"What details do you want?" asked Nick.

"You say you sent a reply to the message by this Peter Petronoff?"

"Yes."

"What was the message that you sent, the verbal message?"

"Well, you know I really didn't send a message; I merely told the supposed servant that if he would call for me at eight o'clock in the morning I would go with him to see his master."

"I'd like to ask you, Nick, why you consented to go with him at all or to see the man who wrote that letter."

It was the detective's turn to laugh, although he did it rather uneasily, and he replied:

"To tell the truth, Malet, I don't know. My first impulse was to send the servant packing about his business and to tell him I had no time for such affairs at all, but in spite of my resolution to do so, I found myself consenting to the interview that Dovanief asked for."

"You don't know, then, why it interested you?" asked Malet.

"No. I sat here for some time wondering about it myself, after Petronoff went away, and my conclusion was that it was due simply to the interest that I always feel for things Russian. You know I have been rather closely associated with some affairs over there."

Malet nodded.

"I suppose you believe this fellow's story," he said; "I mean the one that he's written here in this letter."

Nick laughed again.

"It hasn't occurred to me yet to ask myself whether I believe it or not," he said. "I think, if you are interested to know, that my curiosity is aroused about the whole matter. Not because of the danger which Dovanief says threatens him, but because of some subconscious interest in the matter which I cannot define."

"Possibly it's the girl," suggested Malet.

"What girl?" asked Nick, totally forgetful of the mention that had been made of Dovanief's daughter.

"Olga Dovanief."

Nick stared at Malet after he uttered the name, and then he laughed aloud.

"I pledge you my word, Malet," he said, "that I had totally forgotten her existence or that such a person had been mentioned."

"You would not have forgotten, had you ever seen her," said Malet significantly.

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because, Nick, unless she has greatly changed during the past four years, she is the most beautiful young woman that the sun ever shone on."

"Oho!" laughed Nick, "so you are acquainted with the young lady, are you?"

"I have met her."

"Where?"

"In St. Petersburg."

"When?"

"Rather more than four years ago."

"Who and what is she?" asked Nick. "An anarchist, a nihilist, and a plotter against the Russian throne, like her father?"

"She was always suspected," replied Malet slowly, "of being a spy in the pay of the Russian Government, and therefore against the interests her father was supposed to uphold."

The detective was silent a moment, and then he said:

"You made that remark ambiguously, Malet; as if, while you said one thing, you intended to imply another. May I ask exactly what you did mean?"

"The devil of it is that I don't know exactly what I do mean," replied Malet, and he laughed shortly. "I only know that she is a beautiful girl who has been raised from her infancy in the hotbed of Russian intrigue, and that she has breathed the air of it so long and has absorbed the ideas of it so thoroughly that it is impossible for the shrewdest of us—or at least when I was there—to determine anything definitely about her."

"Well," said Nick, "to return to the subject under discussion, that is, to return directly to it, it certainly was not the mention of the daughter that induced me to accept Dovanief's invitation to me to call upon him."

Malet was silent a moment, gazing at the ceiling near a far corner of the room, thoughtfully, then he said:

"Won't you describe to me the manner and appearance of this man, Peter Petronoff?"

"In appearance," replied the detective, "he might be described by our very expressive term, a 'wooden Indian.' He has a skin of parchment, the face of a plaster cast, the countenance of a wax figure, it being absolutely devoid of expression of any kind. His voice is utterly impersonal and conveys nothing to you save the words he utters. His aspect is stolid, indifferent, and dogged. His language, and he spoke only in English while he was here, is perfect, and no fault could be found with his manners. He is evidently a man of education. The only remarkable thing about him that I noticed were his eyes."

"What about them?" asked Malet quickly.

"They seemed to be struggling all the while to get away from him—I mean in the matter of their expression," replied the detective, smiling. "It was as if his whole attention was centered upon keeping them as stolidly expressionless as his voice and face; but now and then they escaped the restraint he exercised over them and were remarkably bright with a rather startling kind of intelligence.

"As if he anticipated what you were going to say to him?" interrupted Malet.

"Just exactly that."

"How tall is he, Nick?"

"About my own height; a broad and deep chest. Evidently a powerful man, with long and sinewy arms; a man whom I should suppose, from the opportunity I had to study him, possesses as much strength with the ability to use it, as I do."

Malet slapped his hand down on the table vehemently.

"Good!" he exclaimed; "I know him. Your description is so exact, principally as to the eyes, that I haven't a doubt that I am right concerning who he really is."

"And who is he?" asked Nick.

Instead of replying directly to this question, Malet left his chair and took two turns across the floor before he resumed it; and then he said:

"Nick, I think you have unwittingly fallen upon a very pretty little plot which ought to work out most beautifully so far as our professional interest is concerned. And, likewise, it was exceedingly fortunate that you telephoned to me, for I think that I can put you wise to exactly what it means."

"That's good," said the detective. "Let's hear what you have to say about it."

CHAPTER III.

A MAN TO BE FEARED.

"I will tell you all I know about Dovanief, to begin with," said Malet, after he had lighted a fresh cigar.

"All right," said Nick, "and after that I would like to hear also all that you can tell me about the beautiful daughter to whom you have referred, as well as this Peter Petronoff, whom you say you know by another name."

"Dovanief," continued Malet, not heeding the interruption, "is an assumed name, but the man has worn it so long and is so well known by it among all the plotters and schemers of Russia that it might be said to belong to him—or, at least, and perhaps this is better—he belongs to the name."

"That isn't bad; go on," said Nick.

"Dovanief has royal blood in his veins and what isn't royal is noble. There is no man in Russia, not excepting the czar himself, who is higher born than he, save the one ineradicable stain upon it which you may surmise and which cannot be wiped out; but he might with truth and reason bear the name of Alexandrovitch, if he chose to do so."

"I understand," said the detective.

"There was a time, during the reign of the third Alexander, when Dovanief was rather high in place and authority, although he was then still a young man, and is by no means an old one now."

Nick nodded.

"Go on," he said.

"The Council of the Empire objected to Dovanief; to use an expression of our own, they had it in for him all the way around, and the plotting and planning against him went on so expeditiously and so perfectly that it resulted in his downfall. He was confined in the fortress for a time, and it was generally supposed that he was dead, and it was even reported that he had committed suicide—officially reported, that is; but the fact is, that he was deported or exiled to the mines of Siberia, from which he ultimately escaped, and instead of seeking another country, as any man of his sense in his position would have done, he returned directly to Moscow and thence to St. Petersburg, where he allied himself with the very bitterest of the foes of the government."

"I have known of many such cases as that," said Nick.

"Dovanief's known ability, education, and craftiness quickly earned for him a leadership among these men he had joined, and he speedily became the most important and the most powerful man among the nihilists, for the word 'nihilist' is, I believe, the only one which conveys to the average mind an idea of the government's worst foe."

The detective nodded.

"The strange part of it all was," continued Malet, "that while he did not openly show himself and did not

expose himself to unnecessary danger of arrest, the fact remains that he did remain in St. Petersburg under very thin disguises and aliases, and that he constantly escaped the efforts of the secret police to arrest him. In fact, Nick, he defied the government and likewise, in fact, the government seemed powerless to call his bluff.

"I was associated with the secret police there at that time, as you know. I came into personal contact with Dovanief two or three times, and there were occasions when I believed that he was really under government pay all the time."

"Do you mean," asked Nick, "that he was acting as a government spy, even after he had been exiled to Siberia?"

"No, I don't mean that; I mean after he escaped, and had returned."

"All right; I understand you. Go on."

"When I left Russia and went to Paris, I was there for some time as you may know."

"Yes."

"While in Paris I frequently came in contact with agents of the Russian Government and with agents of the Russian nihilists. Their affairs no longer interested me, and I confess I paid very little heed to them save in following out the development of a case now and then with which I had formerly been familiar; but Dovanief always interested me, Nick."

The detective was visibly impatient during this rather lengthy dissertation upon Russian affairs, for he was so familiar with many stories of this character that there was nothing new in Russian nihilism to him.

"What has all this got to do with the present letter of Dovanief's?" he asked, and Malet smiled before he replied:

"I understand your impatience, old chap," he said. "I haven't meant to weary you with this talk about Russian politics, but in view of this letter," and he tapped it where it lay on the table in front of him, "it seemed to me you should know something about the previous history of Dovanief."

"I wish you'd go on with what you've got to say about him," said Nick. "It's quite evident to me that that letter and the mention of his name and the appearance of the man who passes as his servant suggest something definite to you which you have not yet referred to."

"Yes, that is quite true."

"What was it, Malet?"

"It suggested to me, Nick, what I have often thought before about Dovanief; that he was all the while a nihilist; all the while in sympathy with the revolutionaries; all the while a terrorist at heart, even during the time when he served the third Alexander, before his exile to Siberia; and it suggested to me that I have always been correct in a suspicion that I once formed about him, and to which I have already referred in this conversation, that he really was in the pay of the Russian Government at the time I spoke about, but that he was hoodwinking the officials; pulling the wool over their eyes, and pretending to act as a spy for them while all the time he was a spy on the other side."

"I have guessed as much as that, already," said Nick.

"Well," said Malet, "here is something that you do not know and that I would not have known only for an accidental encounter with an old acquaintance that I had the day before yesterday, here in the streets of New York."

"Now you are getting down to something definite and interesting," said Nick.

"There was a Frenchman named Latrobe who was on the Russian secret police at the same time I was, who is here in New York now. I met him on the street day before yesterday. We stopped just long enough to shake hands while he asked for my address. He was engaged at the moment and could not linger. But that evening he called upon me and in the spirit of old comradeship we exchanged confidences. I suppose as a matter of fact he told me rather more than he intended to."

"Well?" said the detective.

"In a word, Nick, he told me he was here shadowing the one man who, of all others, is the most feared and dreaded by the Council of the Empire in Russia.

"He did not tell me the man's name, and it did not occur to me that it was Dovanief until this conversation with you here, but now I feel sure that he was referring to Dovanief all the time."

"Well," said Nick, "that's interesting as far as it goes."

"I suppose you know, Nick, as well as I do, that this suggestion of assassination as made in Dovanief's letter to you is all nonsense in this country, don't you?"

"On the face of it, it is, of course," replied the detective, "only I don't think the Russian Government would hesitate to put a man out of the way, even here in New York City, if they thought it expedient to do so."

Malet shrugged his shoulders.

"Such a thing is possible, of course," he said, "but it isn't a thing the Russian Government is fond of, and it isn't a thing that their agents like to do."

"Naturally."

"Of course there are ways of doing such things which are more or less safe for the man who commits them; for instance, Dovanief might be knocked down and run over by an automobile, or he might be poisoned, or a thousand and one things might happen to him which would not cast direct suspicion upon the man who committed it; but the point that I wished to make was that Dovanief's reference to it there is a direct effort to deceive Nick Carter."

Nick laughed and helped himself to a fresh cigar.

"I guessed that at once," he replied. "It is not the first time it's been tried."

"Did it occur to you to ask yourself what his object was in attempting that deception?" asked Malet.

"Oh, yes; it occurred to me to ask myself the question, but I don't think I found a satisfactory answer."

"I don't know that I can find one, either," said Malet, after a lengthened silence, "but I think it is a very safe proposition to say that Dovanief has no real fear of assassination. I don't believe the man ever feared assassination in his life, although he has lived almost all his life very much closer to it than now. I have never heard, Nick, that he was afraid of anything, and certainly he would not write such a whining plea as that to you, if he is the real Dovanief, unless, being the real Dovanief, he has a very large and eloquent ulterior motive in view."

"And which aspect of the case do you take?" asked Nick.

"The latter."

"You mean by that, then, that he has some definite motive in calling me into his affairs?"

"Yes."

"As associated with his plots and plans against the government of Russia?"

"Yes."

The detective shook his head.

"I confess," he said, "that I don't see just wherein I am to be made to assist him in any way in a matter of that kind."

"Nor do I, Nick, but it will develop; you may be assured of that; it will develop later on. Dovanief is as deep a scoundrel as ever lived. He is not afraid of man, or the devil. He is adored by his followers, who would go to perdition for him for the asking. His appearance here in New York is the indication, at least to me, of some deep-laid scheme wherein your personal activity, for or against him, may be the benefit; and if you like, Nick, I will help you to study out what it means."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEAD MAN ON THE FLOOR.

"I am very much obliged to you, Malet," said the detective, "for the offer you make, and you may rest assured that I will call upon you if there is occasion to do so. Of course, I know nothing of what may come out of this call that I intend to make upon your Russian in the morning, and my only object in asking you to come here now has been achieved, for I wished you to tell me if you knew about the man at all."

"I haven't told you all I know about him," replied Malet, "but I think I have told you all that may be of interest at the present moment."

"Quite so; and now about this man Petronoff, Malet?"

"Of course you must remember, Nick, that I am only guessing about his identity and that I am doing the guessing from the description you have given me."

"Yes."

"From the description, and I am quite convinced I am right about it, I think the man who poses as Dovanief's servant and who brought the message to you and carried back your reply is Prince Michael Orloff."

"And who is he?" asked Nick.

"Orloff is one of the Russian princes of whom there are many who wear the title without any means to uphold it, and it might be said without honor. He is a Russian prince by inheritance, but I believe the estates in this instance were confiscated in his grandfather's time. At all events, his rank of nobility is not now recognized in Russia. Nevertheless, Nick, he has the blood and the descent, and I might add the education, to make him doubly a dangerous man for his enemies. If he is Orloff, he hates the Russian Government and everything pertaining to it, and the very fact of his present association here in New York with Ivan Dovanief is sufficient to make me positive that there is some plot afoot that is greater and deeper than any they have yet entered into."

"Is Orloff also an exile from Russia?" asked the detective.

"Yes and no."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that, if he should return to his own country, he would be politely informed that his room was better than his company. He would be warned to cross the frontier with the least possible delay or take the consequences, and they would be made very unpleasant."

"You mean," said Nick," that he would be arrested if he did not leave, but would not be molested until he failed to do so?"

"Exactly."

"Very well; I think we may leave Orloff for the present, and now will you tell me just where you think that Madam Dovanief and her daughter cut any ice in this business?"

"There you have me, Nick. I don't know and cannot guess."

"Why?"

"I do know, or I think I know, that Madam Dovanief has no sympathy, and further, has had no sympathy, with the political affairs of her husband; she married him when he was a favorite at the palace and promptly deserted him when he lost favor. I had no idea that she was present in this country, and am surprised to hear that she is. I cannot believe that she is a willing party to any of Dovanief's schemes, but it is possible that he has succeeded in deceiving her to the extent of her permitting him to remain in her society now that they are all here."

"And the daughter?" asked Nick.

"Again you have me puzzled."

"Again, why?"

"I have already partly explained the answer to that question, but I will add to what I have said that, while the mother and the daughter have always been devoted to each other so far as my knowledge goes, they have never been in sympathy with each other in the matter of political scheming. The daughter inherits her father's temperament and love of intrigue and fearlessness. She is like a man almost in that last quality."

"Who was Madam Dovanief before she married her husband?"

"She was Prince Michael Orloff's sister," replied Malet, with a smile.

"Ah!" said Nick, "so if my Peter Petronoff is really Michael Orloff, he is brother and uncle to the two women and brother-in-law as well as friend to the arch-plotter. It's quite a family affair."

"So it would seem."

"And there doesn't seem to be any use in further conjecture, does there, Malet, till after I have made my morning call?"

"No, only I was about to make a suggestion concerning that event."

"Good. What is it?"

"Possibly you will not like it."

"Oh, yes, I will. What is it?"

"I was going to suggest that I accompany you when you make that call."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Nick, "but I should be delighted to have you do so, only I very much question if our stolid friend, Peter Petronoff, would consent to guide both of us there; and, moreover, Malet, you have met and talked with Dovanief several times, and unless you disguise yourself——"

"I certainly should disguise myself; I had already thought about that."

"All right," said Nick, "be here at half-past seven o'clock in the morning, or, better still, remain overnight. You can do that just as well as not, and there is everything that you require for a make-up here."

And this course was finally decided upon, so that in the morning when Peter Petronoff was ushered into the reception-room just as the clock on the mantel was striking eight he found two men awaiting him, one of whom was, of course, the detective, and the other, Charles Malet.

If Peter Petronoff was at all interested in the presence in that room of Nick Carter's companion, he did not show it by word or sign.

Beyond one quick glance toward Malet, he seemed entirely unmindful of his presence, and even when the two men arose and followed him from the room and the house, he made no comment. It was as if he had fully expected the two men to accompany him.

He did not seat himself; indeed, the detective did not ask him to do so, but the moment the Russian entered the door he announced in his punctilious and stolid manner:

"I am here, sir, to guide you to my master."

"Very well," replied Nick, "we will go at once."

He waited then a moment, expecting Petronoff to ask if the other man was to accompany them, and prepared himself to insist that his "assistant" should go; but there was no such question; there was no evidence of interest in the matter on the part of Peter Petronoff at all.

They passed from the house together and walked down the avenue to the second corner below, Petronoff leading the way, with Nick and Malet following in his wake.

There, just around the corner, a closed carriage was drawn up against the curb, and their guide stepped forward swiftly, opened the door of it, and stood aside, waiting stolidly for them to enter.

They did so, Nick getting into the hack first, and when Malet had stepped inside and closed the door after him, Petronoff leaped upon the box beside the driver, and they drove rapidly away.

"If it were not for the absurdity of the idea," said the detective, laughing, "I should say that this looked very much like a trap."

"You have been led into so many," replied the secret service man, "that you ought to recognize the appearance of one when you see it."

"Well," Nick laughed again, "this certainly has all the earmarks, only it is somewhat absurd to think of one as happening at eight o'clock in the morning of a bright, sunny day, a block and a half from my own house, and engineered by people who are totally unknown to me."

"I don't think it's a trap," said Malet dryly, with pronounced emphasis on the last word."

"Eh?" said Nick. "What do you think it is?"

"I have already told you that; I think it is a plot."

"But not against us, eh?"

"Not against you, no; and certainly not against me."

"Then again, whom?"

"Always the Czar of Russia, my dear Nick."

"But why are we drawn into it?"

"Probably as witnesses."

"As witnesses? Witnesses of what, for what, and why?"

"That's a queer combination of questions, old chap, and I haven't the least idea how to answer any of them, but as I told you before, Dovanief is a deep one and he wouldn't have sent for you in the first place or have written that wheedling, cringing, half-cowardly letter unless there was a deep motive behind it which we are not permitted to see at the present moment."

They drove on in silence after that for a considerable distance, crossing over to the eastern side of the city and thence turning south along First Avenue until they arrived at the thickly populated districts of the metrop-

olis, where, after a while, they turned again into a side street, the name of which need not be mentioned here, and drew up before the door of an old-fashioned brick house with dormer windows in the roof, where the servant, as he called himself, leaped to the pavement, opened the door of the hack, and stood bowing before them.

"This way, if you please, gentlemen," he said quickly, and with more animation than he had shown heretofore, "my master was exceedingly anxious when I left him. He had received a letter this morning which made him dread a call from his enemies at almost any moment."

The man ran lightly up the steps and inserted a key in the lock of the door.

The door, however, swung open before he touched it and before he had a chance to turn the lock, and the man turned an affrighted face toward the detective as he exclaimed:

"Some one has been here during my absence; some one has burst open this door since I came out of it!"

Nick felt a slight pressure on his arm from Malet, as Petronoff pointed ahead of them toward the inner door of the vestibule, which stood partly ajar and with the glass in one side of it shattered.

"Something has happened! Something terrible!" exclaimed Petronoff, in Russian, as if he were too excited to speak in English, and he started forward a second time, passed through the hallway to a closed door at the end of it, threw it open, and leaped inside the room beyond.

Nick, who had followed him closely, saw him stop suddenly and heard him utter an exclamation of horror, and then Petronoff's right arm straightened out, and he pointed with rigid finger toward an object which was lying on the floor in the middle of the room.

The object he indicated was a dead man.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIOT ON THE SECOND FLOOR.

The man on the floor was a typical Russian in height and in physique.

He was more than six feet tall and possessed a powerful physique, which made it seem incredible that he should lie there so quietly, as if he had been easily overcome in the struggle which had ended in his death.

As for Orloff, as we shall hereafter refer to him, since that was his correct name, he seemed to be utterly overwhelmed by the shock of his friend's death.

The body was lying on its side, with the right arm extended under the head, and just back of and beneath the socket of the left arm the long and heavy hilt of a dagger showed itself like the head of a serpent, as if to announce the cause of that sudden death.

Orloff stood beside the body, with his hands clasped together in front of him, looking down upon it in silence, although his shoulders heaved, and he bore every outward evidence of the utmost grief.

For an instant only the detective bent over the silent form on the floor, and then he turned to Malet, who had followed him into the room, and asked:

"Is this the Dovanief whom you knew?"

"It would seem so," replied Malet.

"What do you mean by that, Charlie? Aren't you sure?"

"Oh, yes; I am sure enough."

"But what do you mean? Your manner is not convincing."

"I mean," said Malet slowly, and in a tone that was still lower, for the two were conversing in a half-whisper so that Orloff would not be able to hear them, "that while I half-expected to find the body of a man here when we arrived, I didn't believe that it would be the body of Dovanief."

For a moment the detective looked steadily into the eyes of his friend, without speaking, and then he said:

"I think I begin to understand you, Malet. Your previous acquaintance with these people have given you a little bit the advantage of me, but I think I understand you now."

The detective turned to Orloff then, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Is that your master?" he asked him, pointing to the body on the floor.

Orloff nodded his head, but made no reply in words.

"Is that your master?" repeated Nick, speaking sharply. "Answer me!"

"Yes; that was my master."

"Your master, or your friend?"

"Both, perhaps; my friend, if you prefer it so."

"Your real name is not Petronoff, is it?"

"No."

"What is it?"

"Michael Orloff."

"You and Dovanief were brother conspirators, instead of master and servant, were you not?"

"We were both, Mr. Carter. I acknowledged him as master because he was my chief. I acknowledged him as master because he possessed the master mind. The man who lies dead there on the floor before us was a great man, Mr. Carter. I was proud to serve him."

The detective had already touched the face and the hands of the corpse tentatively two or three times, and now he bent forward, and did it again.

"What time did you leave the man here, Orloff?" he demanded.

"I went directly from him to you, Mr. Carter."

"Did you drive there in the hack that brought us here?"

"Yes."

"You had, then, ordered the hack to call here for you at a certain hour?"

"Yes; at half-past seven."

"You arrived at my house exactly at eight o'clock. I noticed that the clock was striking as you entered the reception-room."

"It is my habit to be prompt, sir."

"If you drove rapidly, and from the appearance of the horses I should say that you did so, you made the distance from here to my house in about twenty minutes."

Orloff nodded.

"I should think that is about the time," he said.

"We were twenty-five minutes in returning here from the house, and you were not inside my house to exceed five minutes of actual time, so we may safely say that you had been absent from this room less than an hour when you returned to it a moment ago."

"Yes," said Orloff, "I had thought of that."

Nick happened at that instant to raise his eyes so that they encountered Malet's, who was steadily regarding them, and he caught a little gleam of amused intelligence at this reply of Orloff's.

He nodded his head toward Malet to indicate that he might ask the question which Nick knew had occurred to him, and Malet instantly spoke.

"Are you sure, Orloff," he said quickly, "that you had not thought of that before you left this house?"

Orloff started. He raised his eyes quickly to Malet's face, and there was a gleam of anger in them as he replied slowly:

"It is quite possible, sir."

Malet, with a shrug of his shoulders, turned away, and Nick continued questioning Orloff.

"Was Dovanief alone when you left him?" he asked.

"I left him in this room alone when I went out of it," replied Orloff.

"You expected him to await your return with me here, did you not?"

"Yes."

"When you left the house, did you close the outer doors after you, and did they latch?"

"They did."

"Are you positive about that?"

"I am."

"Where were Madam Dovanief and her daughter at the time you left the house?"

"Madam Dovanief had returned to her room only a few moments before I took my departure to go after you. Mademoiselle Olga I have not seen this morning."

"Do you mean that she had not arisen?"

"I mean what I say; I had not seen her."

"Do you know if she had arisen?"

"My impression is, if I have any concerning it, is that she had not. I know nothing about it."

"Both the ladies were aware of the expected visit of mine here this morning, were they not?"

"Certainly."

"Has it struck you, Orloff, that the house seems strangely quiet, and that if there has been an assassination here, which seems evident, there may be other crimes to discover than this one?"

Orloff turned with wonderful activity, darted from the back parlor into the hallway, ran through it, and swung himself around the end of the balustrade, and although Nick and Malet both followed him he was at the top of the stairs on the second floor considerably in advance of them.

In a second more he was pounding upon the door of what, in that character of house, is known as the "alcove room," and he was still rapping diligently upon it when Nick reached him and turned the handle to open it.

But the door refused to respond to the pressure he put upon it, so with one step backward the detective raised his right foot and planted it solidly against the door where it clung to the frame, smashing it open with the single blow he delivered.

Even then Orloff was the first to cross the threshold, although Nick was practically beside him when he did so.

The room, rather a large one, was in the utmost disorder.

Two chairs had been overthrown; books, ornaments, and a drop-light, from the chandelier above it, had been pushed from the center-table to the floor, while seated in an armchair close to one of the windows was a woman whose age might have been anything between forty and fifty-five, bound to the chair with cords, and gagged with a towel, that had been twisted and forced between her teeth.

It required but a moment to release her, and the instant the gag was removed from her mouth she began to talk volubly in Russian, describing, in her own rapid and possibly characteristic way what had happened.

But the detective interrupted her, speaking in English, which he had reason to believe was understood.

"We will hear your story presently, madam," he said; "just now, I will thank you to direct us to the room of your daughter."

"My daughter! my daughter! my daughter!" she exclaimed. "What can have happened to her? Go to her at once; it is the rear room on this floor!"

She started to her feet herself, but the detective jumped in front of her, and, passing through the hall, was again obliged to kick in the second door as he had done with the first one, for, like that, it had been locked on the outside.

And here the conditions were almost identical with those they had found in the front room.

The disorder was perhaps even greater. One of the chairs had been broken; the bed had been torn apart and

a pillow-case had been removed from one of the pillows, for use as a gag, while the young woman herself had been tied to the chair in which they found her with the sheets, after they had been twisted into the form of ropes.

A picture or two had been torn from the walls; some book-shelves at one side of the room had been overturned, and the contents of the bureau had been scattered upon the floor, as if in the struggle that had preceded the tying, the victim or her assailants, had seized upon the linen scarf that had been used to cover it, and thus had despoiled it of its contents, which had crashed to the floor together.

The girl herself had been forced into a sleepy hollow chair, to which she had been fastened so that she could not leave it.

It was Nick Carter who released Olga Dovanief from her unpleasant condition, and he noticed with some interest that her conduct when she was liberated was directly the antithesis of her mother's.

She remained perfectly still in the chair when the twisted sheets and the pillow-case were taken from her, as if she were waiting for her blood to circulate properly again, and using the time to collect her thoughts, as well, for she uttered no word at all, and merely nodded her appreciation of the act.

During these two scenes—the one enacted in the front room, and this one—Malet had been a silent observer, for he had followed the others into both rooms, although he had taken no part in the proceedings in either of them.

Now, while Olga Dovanief was collecting her thoughts, and apparently trying to recover an equanimity which she had not lost, Nick turned to him swiftly, and uttered the single sentence:

"Take Madam Dovanief back into the front room, Malet. I don't want these two women to talk together until I have questioned them separately."

He turned then to Madam Dovanief, who, of course, had followed them into the room, and was now on her knees beside her daughter, chafing her hands, and he said, somewhat sternly:

"Madam, if you please, my friend here would like to ask you some questions which he thinks he can do to more advantage if you are alone with him. Your daughter is all right now, and neither of you have been injured. Will you kindly follow him back into the front room?"

She raised her eyes to his, and there was one flash of antagonism in them, Nick thought, although there was as yet only a vague idea in his own mind why there should be, and then, with a curt nod, she followed Malet from the room.

Nick turned then to Orloff, who had resumed his stolid demeanor and attitude, and who now stood with his hands behind his back, staring at nothing.

"Orloff," he said sharply, "do me the favor to return to the back parlor, and stand guard there until I come. I think I can trust you not to leave the house without permission."

CHAPTER VI.

A HOUSE OF TRAGEDY.

The detective had been obliged to think quickly while these scenes were taking place within the two rooms already described.

And he had been quick to notice that there had been almost too much system in the preparation of these scenes just encountered to make them seem logical, compared to the time that had passed since their creation.

It seemed to him that the dead man on the floor in the back parlor was the only real incident of the whole affair, and, while for the moment he had no doubt whatever that Dovanief had been killed, the impression was forcibly upon him that the assassination had been done with the connivance and approval of Orloff and the two women he had found, bound and gagged, in the house.

The disorder in the front room and in the back room on the second floor was rather too studied, and much too complete, to seem natural to the detective.

There was nothing, however—there had been nothing—in the attitude and demeanor of Orloff to suggest that he was a party to the crime; that is, nothing save his general association with it.

The body of a corpse at that season of the year does not grow cold rapidly. *Rigor mortis* will not set in sometimes for several hours, and the fact that the body of the murdered man was still warm when they discovered it could have no scientific bearing upon the case, but it could influence the detective's mind considerably in his characterization of the incident.

When he touched the body in the first place, upon entering the room where it was found, it seemed to him that the chill of death had advanced rather too far—or, at least, farther than it should have done—in the time that Dovanief had probably been dead; for it would appear to the best of Nick Carter's ability at figuring it out, that Dovanief could not, under all the circumstances, have been lying on the floor a corpse more than forty-five minutes—when they found him.

If an assassin had waited outside for the departure of Orloff, and had entered the house after he had gone to meet the detective, the murdered man had probably been dead less than that time.

To be exact the detective had been impressed with the idea the moment he touched the body, that the man had been dead a much longer time than Orloff would like to have it appear.

It was five minutes past eight when the detective and his friend left the former's house to make the call upon

Dovanief, and it was not quite half-past eight when they arrived there.

According to Orloff's statement, it was five or ten minutes after half-past seven when he departed from this house of the crime, and in reality only about fifty minutes elapsed between the time of Orloff's departure from the house and his return to it.

Nick Carter scented in this affair a much deeper plot than appeared upon the surface, and he recalled instantly the remarks that had been made to him by Malet concerning the two men who were most deeply interested in it, one of whom was now dead.

Nick would have liked, if it were possible, to have discussed the matter alone with Malet for a few moments at that time, but he realized the importance of quickly getting the story of the young woman while Malet was listening to what Madam Dovanief had to say about the circumstances.

The question naturally occurred to the detective's mind: Why did the assassin deem it necessary to bind and gag the two women after he had committed the murder in the back parlor? Or, reversing the conditions, why, if he had bound and gagged the two women before he committed the crime, did not the noise of the two struggles alarm Dovanief, and bring him to their rescue?

If the murderer had entered the house only for the purpose of assassinating Dovanief, it was more than likely that he knew perfectly well where to find him, and had gone directly to the back parlor upon entering. It was within the range of possibility that, upon entering the room, Dovanief's back might have been turned toward him, and the Russian agitator might have thought that it was Orloff returning for a moment before his final departure to get the detective.

So it was possible that the assassin might have committed the murder by striking the moment he entered the room, and thus avoiding any necessity for a struggle there.

But, if that were so, why should he regard it as necessary that he should ascend to the second floor and attack the two women, one after the other, and bind them and gag them as he had done?

Why did he attack them at all? Why did he go to the second floor at all? Why, having committed the crime he came there to do, did he not make his escape the instant it was consummated?

Obviously, there was only one answer to these many questions, and the detective regarded it as an absurd one.

It was that there had been at least three men concerned in the attack upon Dovanief, and that the three assaults had been committed at the same time upon each of the victims.

There were complications in the case which interested the detective deeply, and he believed that he saw behind it a deliberate plot on the part of Orloff and the two women to rid themselves forever of Ivan Dovanief.

But at once the question arose: Why should the wife and daughter of the man consent to such violent measures? Why should they become accessories to it, and why, if his death were to be the only object to be attained, should they have resorted to this public method of killing him, and gone to the lengths they had done to secure the presence of the detective, Nick Carter, in the house within a few moments of the time the deed was consummated?

Why should they desire the presence of the detective there at all?

Why had they deemed it necessary, if they were the chief victims of this assassin, to have themselves bound and gagged, and to pose as quasi victims of the outrage?

All together, the affair was exceedingly puzzling.

Nick felt that Malet's previous experiences with these people, and his thorough knowledge of their characteristics, habits, and parts of their lives, would enable him to reason out the present problems with more accuracy, and yet it was the sort of accuracy which the detective deemed it often expedient to avoid, because it was so apt to be misleading.

Nine murders out of every ten are the result of impulse, but here was one that had been deliberately planned and as deliberately consummated, and in such a way that to carry it out as had been done at least three conspirators would have been required if it were performed by persons from outside the family.

These conjectures and queries had passed through the detective's mind one after another since the moment he entered the house; each additional scene as he approached it bringing with it its own interrogation points.

Now he turned and faced the girl who was alone in the room with him, and who, in the meantime, had arisen from the chair, and was standing with her back toward the mantel—as he looked upon her, and perceived that Malet had not exaggerated at all when he had described her beauty, it came to him that if she was one who could deliberately enter into a conspiracy which was to culminate in the murder of her own father her countenance and her demeanor and the entire make-up of the girl more thoroughly belied her character than any one he remembered to have seen in his career.

His first question was characteristic of the detective; he said:

"Where is your father, Miss Dovanief?"

"I don't know," she replied; "have you not found him?"

Instead of replying to her answering question, he asked another:

"Is your father somewhat deaf, mademoiselle?"

She seemed surprised at the question, and she replied to it instantly, as Nick hoped she would do.

"Not at all," she said.

The detective pointed at the clock that ticked upon the mantel behind where she was standing, the hands of which now pointed to ten minutes of nine, so rapidly had incidents followed one another since they came to the house.

"Have you any recollection, or did you notice, the time when you were attacked?" he asked her.

"Yes," she replied glibly, "I had just finished dressing. I was about to begin the arrangement of my room, preparatory to going down-stairs to find my father, when they entered the room."

"When who entered it?" asked Nick.

"Those men."

"What men were they?"

"The men who atacked me."

"How many of them were there?"

"Two."

"Had you heard any noise before they entered the room?"

"Nothing more than footsteps in the hallway outside the door."

"You had heard no noise from your mother's room?"

"No, sir."

"There are two partitions between this room and that one, mademoiselle, that may account for it, or did you, perhaps, hear noises from your mother's room after the two men left you?"

"No, I did not."

"Tell me how they broke into your room."

"They did not need to do so, sir; the door was not locked; it was even ajar two or three inches from the casing."

"Do you mean that you had already passed through the door?"

"Yes; I had been to my mother's room, and returned."

"How long before you were attacked?"

"A few moments; possibly five."

"So it is likely that they made their attack upon you before they went to her room?"

She bowed her head in acquiescence, but made no reply.

"When you heard the steps in the hall outside your door, as of some one approaching it, did you make any effort to ascertain who it was, and when the men burst into the room, what did you do to defend yourself?"

The young woman smiled somewhat wistfully as she replied:

"I heard the steps in the hallway, as I told you, and I supposed at the instant that they were made by my father. When the door was opened, my back was to it; I was standing before the mirror, and saw in it the reflection of the two men who had entered the room."

"They were strangers to you?" asked Nick curtly.

"Yes, I was about to tell you that. I saw them the instant they entered, of course; I turned to face them, when one of them leaped forward and seized me, at the same time pressing his hand over my mouth to prevent any outcry. I think I seized the bureau, or the covering upon it, and dragged the things to the floor in the struggle, but, really, sir, I remember very little about it, for it was all over in a moment. I was forced into the chair, the twisted pillow-case was thrust into my mouth, and I was bound and left as you discovered me."

"Had you heard any noise from the room under you before that time, or did you hear any after you were bound and gagged?" asked Nick.

"No," she replied, "to both your questions, sir."

The detective took a step nearer to her and asked, with slow enunciation of each word he uttered:

"Miss Dovanief, do you know that your father has been assassinated, and now lies dead in the room beneath you?"

For a moment she stared at him, her eyes widened, and a suggestion of horror came into them; her form straightened a little, as if she were trying to control some impulse within her, and then, without a word, she pitched forward, and, before Nick Carter could catch her, fell face downward, crashing to the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

A COMPLICATED CASE.

If the conduct of Olga Dovanief at that moment was acting, it was perfect, but, nevertheless, under all the circumstances, Nick Carter could not believe that it was entirely real.

The instant that Olga Dovanief fell to the floor he leaped forward, raised her in his arms, and laid her upon the dismantled bed.

Almost at once she opened her eyes and stared up at him, and Nick smiled a little bit grimly as he asked her:

"Do you feel better now, Miss Dovanief?"

"I don't think I fainted, quite," she replied, in a low voice, "but the shock of what you told me overwhelmed me for the instant. I will arise now, if you will permit me."

He stepped back, away from the bed, without offering to assist her, and watched her narrowly, as she slowly raised herself, and presently stood upon her feet again.

"May I go to my father now?" she asked, in a low tone, perfect master of herself.

"Yes," said Nick. "I will go with you."

"Has my mother been told?" she asked, again, without moving.

"I don't know, mademoiselle. My friend, who came with me, is dealing with her."

"Are you Mr. Carter, the gentleman whom my father was expecting to call this morning?"

"Yes."

"You know, then, do you not, that he has believed himself to be in danger of assassination for some time past?"

"He wrote me to that effect," replied the detective evasively.

She seemed upon the point of asking more questions, but she withheld them, and with a slight inclination of her head went past him, and descended the stairs, followed by the detective, who watched her narrowly as she entered the room where the corpse was lying on the floor, and where Michael Orloff was brooding over it in his own stolid and somber way.

When Olga reached the side of the dead man she got down upon her knees instantly beside him, and turned the head about so that she could see the face; and then she started quickly to her feet, with a low cry, and staggered backward directly into the arms of the detective, who supported her to a chair.

"Is it your father?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered, with horror in her eyes.

"Miss Dovanief," he said suddenly, "have you any knowledge concerning this crime that you have not imparted to me?"

"Why, sir, what do you mean?"

"Have you any knowledge concerning this crime that you have not told me? Answer me."

"No, I have not. But what do you mean?"

Before the detective could answer, he heard the sounds of persons descending the stairs, and he knew that Malet was approaching with Madam Dovanief. Still intent upon working out the theory he had previously adopted, he touched Olga on the arm, and said to her rather peremptorily:

"Come with me, mademoiselle, if you please."

She arose obediently, and he conducted her to the folding doors between that room and the parlor. These were closed, but he opened them, and led her through into the adjoining room, shutting them again before Malet and Madam Dovanief entered the room of death.

But the detective did not stop there in the parlor with his companion. Instead, he continued on to the door that opened into the hall, near the bottom of the stairs, indicating to her that she was to follow him, and he led the way directly back to her own room on the second floor, for he had suddenly determined to take a chance with this beautiful young woman, by which she might betray herself, possibly, if she did have any real connection with the crime.

As soon as they were in her room he closed the door with an ostentatious appearance of caution, and, turning to her, he said rapidly:

"Mademoiselle, I am going down-stairs again to examine further into the crime that has been committed. You are a very beautiful young woman. If I find you her in this room on my return to it it will be my duty as an officer to place you under arrest as an accessory before the fact of the murder of your father."

He turned quickly, and, approaching the door, opened it, then he added:

"The way will be open for ten minutes for your escape," and before she could reply to him he left the room, closed the door after him, and rapidly descended the stairs.

It was the detective's idea in assuming this extraordinary attitude that if the girl were really guilty as a conspirator in the commission of this crime, she would seize upon the opportunity he had afforded her to make her escape, and he gave her the chance because he had no doubt whatever that he would be able to find her and arrest her at any moment. He did not believe that she could get away from the city and make good her escape from him, and he wished to give her the opportunity to prove her complicity in the tragedy by making the effort to get away.

Descending to the back parlor, he found Malet, with Orloff and Madam Dovanief, grouped around the body, and staring down at the dead face, which Olga had managed to turn so that it was now in view. There was no change whatever in the demeanor of Orloff; indeed, he seemed to be incapable of any, or, rather, his conduct had been so long a studied matter with him that it had become natural.

The face of the woman was pale and drawn and haggard. Her eyes stared. Her fingers twitched, and she clasped and unclasped them nervously. Her shoulders heaved at times, as if in the effort to suppress emotion, and her whole attitude was one of utter dejection, with a suggestion of terror along with it.

"Madam," Nick said to her sharply, and she turned with a start to face him, "I don't know what questions my friend here has asked you," the detective continued slowly, "but I will thank you to answer a few for me and to reply to them as directly as possible."

"Certainly, sir," she replied, in a low tone.

"Do you know who I am?"

"I believe you to be Mr. Carter, the gentleman whom my husband was expecting this morning."

"That is correct. Do you also know that I am a detective officer?"

"I do; yes, sir."

"What time were you attacked this morning in your own room?"

"Shortly before eight o'clock, I think it was."

"Soon after Orloff left the house?"

"It was not long after that."

"Did you see him leave the house?"

"No, sir; but I know when he went away; I heard the carriage."

"You knew that he was going?"

"Of course; yes, sir."

"You knew that he was going for me, to bring me here?"

"Yes."

"Did you see any one approach the house after Orloff left it?"

"No; I don't remember to have looked from the windows, at all."

"Who was it attacked you in your room?"

"There were two men."

"Strangers to you?"

"Yes."

"How did they gain admittance to your room?"

"They rushed in upon me; that is all I know about that."

"Where were you when they attacked you?"

"I was standing at my dresser, before the mirror."

"And you saw their reflection in the mirror when they entered the room?"

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"I turned, of course, to face them."

"And then——"

"They seized me; both of them, I think. One of them clapped his hand over my mouth, and they left me as you found me."

"Had you heard any noise prior to their entrance to the room.

"Only in the sound of footsteps in the hallway."

"Did you recognize those footsteps as being made by persons who did not belong in the house?"

"No, I don't think I did."

"What did you think about them?"

"I don't remember, but if I had any idea at all, I thought it was my husband returning to speak to me."

"Exactly," said Nick. "Had you ever seen either of those men before?"

"No, sir."

"Can you describe them?"

"One was short and rather thick-set, with a figure not unlike Prince Michael's; the other man was as tall as my husband, and as large in every way. Both were bearded, and both wore big hats, which were pulled down over their eyes. One of them, the tall man, carried a dagger in his hand, with which he threatened me if I cried out."

"Did you hear their voices?"

"No, sir. Neither of them spoke to me, save in the utterance of that one threat I have mentioned."

"What did they do when they had bound and gagged you, madam?"

"They left the room again."

"At once?"

"Yes, immediately."

"Before they entered your room had you heard any sound of a struggle from any other part of the house?"

"None whatever."

"Did you hear any noise at all apparently proceeding from your daughter's room?"

"No, sir."

"Or from the parlor floor of the house?"

"No, sir."

"What was your impression of the attack at the time it occurred?"

"One of utter terror, if I had any at all. I knew that my husband was in constant dread of assassination, and I felt that these were the men who had been sent to carry it into effect."

"From whom, madam, did he dread assassination?"

"He believed that it would be performed by emissaries of the Russian Government."

"And when you were attacked you believed those men to be those emissaries?"

"I did."

"Did you lose consciousness when you were bound and gagged and left here?"

"No."

"Did you try to free yourself from your bonds?"

"I don't think I did, for I considered it useless."

"What was the character of your thoughts at that time while you sat there unable to move?"

"I believed that my husband had been assassinated, or that they had gone from me to him to murder him."

"And your daughter? Did you think of her?"

"Certainly."

"Madam, is that dead man there your husband?"

There was a slight catch in her breath as he asked this abrupt question, a catch which might have been attributable to any one of several natural emotions, but Nick and Malet both chose to regard it as one of surprised alarm that such a question should have been asked at all.

She replied at once, however.

"Certainly, sir," she said.

"Madam," said Nick, "do you know and can you tell me just why your husband wished that I should call here this morning to see him?"

"Yes, sir; he was seeking your protection. He feared assassination. There was not a moment of peace in his

life, but, sir, he has been accustomed for many years to living in constant peril of his life, and I doubt if even now he would have done anything to protect himself against the tragedy that has happened had it not been for the earnest desire of my daughter and myself that he should do so."

"I see," said Nick, "and will you tell me now how long it is since you have been so solicitous for the welfare of Ivan Dovanief?"

"What do you mean, sir, by that question?"

"I mean," replied the detective slowly, "that it has come to my knowledge, madam, that for many years you and your husband have not been in sympathy with each other. I am informed that you were opposed to each other politically, and that, at the time of his fall from favor with the czar, you turned your back upon him in contempt. I have not been informed that you at any time resumed your relations with him, or even any evidence whatever that you cared what happened to him, or what his fate might be. If all those things are true, and I suppose them to be so, it strikes me as rather odd that you should have suddenly become so solicitous for his well-being. Will you explain the matter to me?"

"I always loved my husband," she replied simply, and so directly that Nick could not doubt that she was telling the truth. "It is true, sir, that we parted; it is true that I deserted him when he needed me most; it is also true that upon his arrival in this country, and after our meeting here, as we did, my old love returned with redoubled intensity."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARCH-CONSPIRATOR.

The detective looked at his watch, discovering that the allotted ten minutes he had given to Olga Dovanief to make her escape had expired.

He felt that if Madam Dovanief were, indeed, associated with the crime that had been committed she had at least scored a well-taken point in her own defense.

It is true that the answers to his questions given by Madam Dovanief had been almost identical with the replies of the daughter, and that the similarity of the two descriptions of the attack suggested a well-learned lesson between them.

He recollected now that he had neglected to ask Olga for a description of the two men, although he had no doubt that they would be the same.

Just now, as he remained silent for a moment, he was considering whether he should place these women and this man, who still stood stolidly beside the victim of the crime, under arrest, and after a moment he decided not to do so at once.

"Malet," he said to his friend—and he was instantly sorry that he had spoken, for he saw that both Orloff and the woman started perceptibly when he uttered the name—"I wish you would step to the corner and telephone to the station-house, if you will do so. Ask the lieutenant in charge to send some of his officers here at once, and request him to notify the coroner.

"Madam, I will ask you to return to your own room and remain there until you are summoned; and Orloff, as a matter of precaution, I will ask you to accompany her. If either of you attempt to leave the house without my permission you will be arrested at once."

The two bowed and turned to leave the room, when the detective added:

"I am giving you this opportunity to arrange between yourselves for answers that you will make to questions that may be asked hereafter."

With Malet, he followed them to the bottom of the stairs, and watched them as they ascended, and he heard them as they passed into the room above and closed the partially wrecked door behind them. Then he went outside upon the front steps with the secret service officer.

"Malet," he said, then, "what do you think about it?"

"To tell you the truth, Nick, I hardly know what to think."

"Did Madam Dovanief reply to the questions you asked her the same as she did to me?"

"Yes; in almost precisely the same words."

"How did it sound to you, Malet?"

"Just as it did to you, I think; very much like a lesson that had been learned."

"Her answers were identical with those of her daughter," continued the detective.

"I supposed so."

The detective was silent for a moment, and then, turning suddenly, and facing his friend, he asked abruptly:

"Malet, are you sure that that dead man in there is Dovanief?"

"Eh? What's that? By Jove, Nick!"

"Are you sure that that dead man in there is Dovanief?"

"I did feel sure of it till this moment."

"How long is it since you saw the man?"

"Approximately, four years."

"I suppose you think that you remember him perfectly."

"I have always thought that I had a good memory for faces, Nick."

"Do you think it possible that you might be deceived in this case?"

"I think it always possible to be deceived in a matter of this kind."

"That doesn't quite answer my question, Malet."

"Yes, then; I think it is possible that I may be deceived in this case."

"But the man looks like Dovanief, doesn't he?"

"He certainly does."

"In height, and physique, and features, and in facial characteristics?"

"Yes."

"So that it would not have occurred to you to doubt the identity of the corpse if I hadn't suggested such a doubt to you?"

"No, I don't think it would."

"Let me ask another question on that point."

"Yes?"

"If you had been passing through this street and had been told that there was a murder in this house, and you had entered the house without any previous knowledge of the presence of Dovanief, or of any one who belonged to him in this country, would you, under such circumstances, have recognized the body of the dead man as Ivan Dovanief, and would you have been sufficiently assured in your own mind of the identification to have given it out officially to the police?"

"I think I would, Nick."

"During your experiences in Russia, did you ever know of a person, or hear of a person, who resembled Ivan Dovanief sufficiently to have deceived you?"

"I never did."

"Did you ever know of any person connected with the secret police of Russia who resembled the man at all."

"I don't recall anything of the kind."

"But you do admit that it is possible that you may be deceived in the identity in the case at the present time?"

"Yes, Nick, I do. I think I understand perfectly well the theory that you are turning over in your own mind at the present moment, and I think under the circumstances by which we are surrounded it is rather well taken. It sounds to me like a plot that is quite worthy of the devilish ingenuity of Ivan Dovanief, but, all the same, Nick, I would like you to explain to me exactly what you are driving at, in order that we may work together in harmony on this point."

Nick was silent a moment, and then he replied:

"Malet, the whole list of occurrences in this house this morning strike me as being extremely peculiar, to say the least."

"I quite agree with you there."

"I touched the body of the dead man, and I noticed you did the same, the moment that we entered the room, and it seemed to me—I may be mistaken, of course, for it is quite possible, under the circumstances—but it seemed to me then that he had been dead considerably more than an hour when we saw him first."

"I had the same impression, Nick."

"If that is the case, he was murdered before Orloff left the house to go after me."

"Certainly."

"To go back as far as last night, when the letter from Dovanief was brought to me at my house, I regarded it at the time as a little bit strange that I should have been asked to defer my call upon the man who besought my aid, until this morning, and that in the face of the fact that he asserted that he stood in momentary fear of death. It was only about five o'clock when the message was brought to me. I could have gone to him and returned to my house before dark, and it seemed to me after that, and particularly after I discussed the matter with you, as if they wished to be positively assured that I would make the requested call at a specified hour."

Malet nodded.

"Now, my friend," the detective continued, "since our arrival at this house this morning, things have gone altogether too smoothly and too perfectly to be quite natural. The plans seem to me to have been quite too well prepared. The dead man on the floor with his face turned so that it could not be seen at once was not in exactly a natural position. I mean by that, Malet, that he was not in a position in which he would have been likely to fall upon being struck down with the weapon as he was. The body looked to me as if it had been arranged. Touched up a little bit after the commission of the crime."

Malet nodded again.

"The conditions of the rooms up-stairs were altogether too studied. The wrecking of them and the confusion and disorder we found was too complete or not complete enough. It was either overdone or underdone. There was something distinctly unnatural about the condition of both those rooms."

"I think you are right about that, Nick."

"The stories told by the two women are identical. Each of them was standing at the mirror when intruded upon; each of them saw in the glass the reflection of the faces of strangers who entered upon them; each of them was attacked in precisely the same manner by one of the men stepping suddenly forward and clapping his hand over their mouths to prevent outcry; neither of them heard any commotion in any other part of the house, but either of them might have heard, Malet, the confusion that must ensued if the wrecking of those rooms were entirely natural."

"Again I agree with you."

"If the purpose of the assassins in entering this house was solely to murder Dovanief, why was it necessary at all to attack the two women; and if they were attacked, why was it necessary to bind and gag them? The whole thing, Malet, resolves itself into a collection of absurdities which do not fit together as the crazy-quilt pattern of a crime should do. There are incongruities which suggest preparation.

"But suppose we admit, for the sake of our present argument, that the crime is the result of a conspiracy within this house, a conspiracy made up between Orloff and the women, why should they have committed that crime in exactly the manner it was done, and why should they have wanted to bring me upon the scene?"

Malet shrugged his shoulders.

"It is quite evident to me, Malet, that they did want me here for some special purpose. It is quite evident to me that the letter was written, Orloff's call was made yesterday, and his message to me to bring me here this morning, were all of a plot or scheme that had been deliberately planned."

"There is no doubt you are right about that, Nick."

"And, therefore, Malet, I am forced to the conclusion that the husband and father and brother-in-law is not himself the victim of this crime. I am forced to the conclusion, Malet, that the dead man on the floor in there is not Ivan Dovanief, but is the corpse of another person who has been murdered in his name in order that the Russian authorities may be convinced that the arch-conspirator against their peace and lives has been slain and is dead, and, Malet, I was brought into this case simply to give that appearance of things additional force.

"You have described Dovanief to me as a man of extraordinary ability; of wonderful powers of dissimulation, and as a great schemer and plotter.

"I believe that Madam Dovanief told me the truth when she said that she still loved her husband, and that there had been a resumption of the relations between them. I believe from what I have seen and heard that Orloff was and is now devoted to Dovanief, and as surely as I stand here I believe that that dead man in there is not Ivan Dovanief, but another who has been substituted for him in order that the Russian Government may be convinced of his death to such definite purpose that Dovanief himself, alive and in the possession of all his faculties, may, under a slight disguise, return to Russia and resume his activities there with little danger of discovery and arrest."

"By Jove, Nick! I believe you are right!" exclaimed Malet.

CHAPTER IX.

A BEAUTIFUL AND DARING WOMAN.

As soon as Malet had started on his errand to telephone to the police-station and to the coroner, Nick returned to the house and at once took his way up-stairs to discover if Olga had taken him at his word to make her escape from the house.

But he discovered her in her own room seated in a chair near the window and gazing out upon the dreary aspect of back yards, evidently lost in the contemplation of her own present situation.

She turned toward him when he entered the room, and the ghost of a smile flitted across her beautiful face when she perceived who it was. It was at once evident to the detective that she was prepared for him, and that she had thoroughly shaped out the course she intended to pursue.

He waited for her to speak first, and presently she did so.

"You see that I did not take advantage of your exceedingly kind offer," she said.

"Yes. Why?"

"Would it not have been folly for me to attempt to fly from you?"

"Again why?"

"First, because I have nothing to escape from, and, second, because you would not have permitted me to go very far without at least knowing where I was."

"You think that?"

"I am sure of it."

"You are rather a remarkable young woman, Miss Dovanief."

"Doubtless. My life has been a remarkable one since I can remember."

"You have lived all your life in the midst of intrigue, have you not?"

"I suppose so."

"Now that you have chosen to remain here and await my return, I think it is forced upon me, Olga Dovanief, to place you under arrest."

"For what, Mr. Carter."

"For complicity in the murder of the man who lies dead in the room beneath us."

"My own father?"

"No; not your father. I don't think I mentioned his name, young woman. I referred to the man who is lying dead in the room beneath us."

"But that man is—or was——"

"Wait one moment, if you please. I should warn you that anything and everything you may say to me now will necessarily be used against you in court."

"Indeed! That is kind of you."

"Therefore, be very careful what you say to me."

"I will endeavor to be so, sir."

"I am convinced that the dead man below is *not* your father."

She had started slightly when the detective first made the insinuation that the dead man was not her father, but now that he stated openly that he did not believe it was Ivan Dovanief who had been killed, she smiled back at him with an expression that would have defied the most expert of physiognomists to delineate.

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, and kept her eyes fixed upon him until he broke the silence. Then he said:

"I wish you would describe to me the appearance of the two men who attacked you."

"Why should I do so? You will not believe what I say."

"Nevertheless, I would like to hear that description."

"To discover if it tallies with the description given to you by my mother?" she asked coolly, and with remarkable daring, Nick thought. "The two descriptions should agree, should they not?"

"Possibly."

"Did she describe one man as tall—as tall as my father?"

"Yes."

"And the other as short and thick-set—like Prince Michael?"

"Yes."

"Both bearded?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is correct."

"She also described the method of their attack as being precisely the one that was employed against you."

"I suppose that, naturally, if they were to attack two different women so nearly at the same time and so nearly under the same circumstances, they would be inclined to employ the same methods, would they not?" she asked coldly.

"Quite so."

"Is there anything strange about the fact, then, that our stories should be about the same as to the two affairs?"

"Perhaps not."

The young woman had remained seated in the chair near the window, and now Nick drew another chair toward her and seated himself upon it.

"I wish, Miss Olga, that I could understand you a little better than I do," he said.

"You are not the first who has expressed that wish," she replied coldly.

"Perhaps not. I have heard that you are something of an enigma."

"I have been that, all my life, even to myself."

"More to yourself than to others, possibly; eh?"

She nodded.

"For instance," continued the detective, "you are asking yourself now—or were asking it of yourself when I entered the room—how you were simple enough to permit yourself to become entangled in a conspiracy of this kind, which the veriest amateur of a detective might see through. Were you not?"

"Are you a mind-reader, Mr. Carter?"

"Have I, then, read you so correctly?"

"I did not say that you had read me at all. I did not intend to convey that impression; but it did strike me

that *you believe* that you had read me, which in effect amounts to the same thing, so I asked you if you considered yourself to be a mind-reader."

"In this particular instance—yes."

"You do not really think that the dead man down-stairs is my father?"

"No. I do not think that the dead man down-stairs is the man who is known all over the world as Ivan Dovanief."

"Why not, if I may ask?"

"There is no reason why I should answer you, but I will."

"Thank you."

"Ivan Dovanief was not a man, is not a man to permit himself to be assassinated in such a manner. He is always on his guard. He has not been off it since he returned to his own country from Siberia. There would have been a struggle if the man attacked had been Ivan Dovanief in possession of his senses. He would not have fallen in the position in which he lies, even if he had been struck dead. That man down there was not struck down while he was standing upright; he was stabbed while he slept, or, at least, while he was unconscious from the ministration of some drug."

"You think so?"

"I am convinced of it, mademoiselle."

"But your friend, Mr. Malet, recognized him, did he not?"

"He thought he did—at first. He has changed his mind."

"Ah! Is it possible that two men can look so much alike as to deceive a wife and a daughter?"

"I do not for a moment suppose the wife and daughter to have been deceived."

"No? What, then?"

"They chose to lie to me."

"You are not complimentary, sir."

"It is hardly a time for compliments, Miss Dovanief."

"Who, then, in your opinion, is the dead man?"

"I do not know. I do not care. Neither, I think, do you care. It is sufficient for your combined purposes that the dead man resembles Ivan Dovanief sufficiently to be mistaken for him. It was all a very pretty little plot, well planned, mademoiselle, if there had not been deliberate murder involved in it. But in the carrying out of Dovanief's scheme, he had many purposes in view. Murder was necessary, not only to eliminate his own individuality from the future efforts of the Russian police, but to have a due effect upon his own party, in making them believe, for a time at least, that the police of Russia had foully murdered their compatriot."

"I am afraid, Mr. Carter, that you give us all credit for more perspicacity than we possess."

"I give you credit, Miss Olga, for being an exceedingly shrewd young woman; for being the daughter of your father, with even more ability than he possesses; for being about as unprincipled as you are shrewd; for unquestioned loyalty to the cause you are wedded to, whatever that cause may be."

She looked at him with a mocking smile on her face and in her eyes.

"You have chosen to be anything but complimentary to me this morning, Mr. Carter," she said presently. "A little bit ago you told me I lied; now you tell me that I am unprincipled. I wonder what you will charge me with next?"

"I shall charge you—I charge you now, with complicity in the murder that has been committed in this house this morning."

She shrugged her shoulders and turned away toward the window for a moment. Then she said:

"Do you think that you will be able to establish such a charge, Mr. Carter?"

"I certainly do."

"Will you tell me how?"

"There is only one way, you know."

"Do I? I am not aware that I know it. Possibly you will be good enough to explain."

"The discovery and arrest of your father for the murder will be the beginning of the explanation, Miss Olga."

"Indeed! And where, pray, do you expect to find him?"

"It is more than possible that he is hiding inside this very house right now," replied the detective instantly. "I think it is more than likely. At any rate, as soon as the officers for whom I have sent arrive here, we will make a most thorough search of the premises."

There was just the merest suggestion of a contraction about her eyes when he uttered the half-statement, half-threat; but it was sufficient to assure Nick Carter that he had made a good guess. He instantly arrived at the conclusion that Ivan Dovanief *was* concealed somewhere quite near to that house, if not inside it.

"I suppose," she said coolly, "that this is one of those

—er—ideas that you detectives call theories, is it not? Or is it deduction? Upon my word, Mr. Carter, you surprise me; you really do. I had until now, given you credit for being a master at your trade, but, honestly, you are not one whit above the others of your calling I have known. Why don't you handcuff me and send me forthwith to prison, if you are so certain of what you say? You gave me one opportunity to escape, of which I did not take advantage. You have a colloquial expression in this very original country of yours that I would like to make use of, sir."

"What is it?" asked the detective, smiling.

"It is this: You make me tired."

The detective laughed aloud. Then he got upon his feet and moved across the room toward the door, for he had heard the sounds of footsteps in the lower hall, and correctly supposed they were made by Malet, who had returned. Without turning or addressing Olga again, he passed out at the door and descended the stairs to meet him.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUSE ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STREET.

"The cops will be here in a moment," announced Malet. "They are at the corner now, on their way here."

"Good," replied Nick. "And you told the lieutenant to send for the coroner?"

"Yes. He will be here at once, also."

"When they arrive, Malet, I think we will search the house thoroughly from top to bottom. I am more convinced than ever that the dead man is not Dovanief, and I have also succeeded in persuading myself that he is concealed somewhere about the premises."

"I would hardly think that, Carter," replied Malet. "It would hardly be like Dovanief to do that. He would put some distance at least between himself and his pursuers, I think. What about the prisoners? Where are they?"

"I have just left Olga. She is in the room where we discovered her upon our arrival. I suppose the other two are waiting where we sent them—in the room of Madam Dovanief."

He turned and led the way up the stairs as he spoke, and in a moment paused before the door of the room he had so lately left, and tapped upon it.

There was no answer, and he pushed the door open and entered. Then he stopped and stared.

The room was empty. Olga was not there.

"What is the matter?" asked Malet, from the hallway, when Nick turned and stepped out of the room again.

"Olga isn't there, Charlie. I left her here only a moment ago. She has doubtless gone into the front room to be with her mother."

He passed along the hall, Malet following, and a moment later pushed open the door of the front room, this time without waiting to rap upon it.

But here another surprise was awaiting him, for the interior of that room was as empty of human occupancy as the other one had been.

Neither the prince nor the madam nor yet Olga were there.

Like a flash he turned and ran up the stairs two steps at a time, toward the top of the house, for his first thought was that all of them had made their escape by way of the scuttle in the roof.

But a glance at it disposed of that idea at once, for it was hooked on the inside, showing plainly that no one had left the house by that method; nor was there any other method of escape that might have been used, from either that floor or the one beneath it.

Malet was grinning when Nick turned to him with a frown of perplexity, and asked:

"What do you make of it?"

"I am not surprised," Malet replied. "Dovanief is not one to lay plans without leaving open a loophole of escape in case they miscarry. He has planned many a coup which has misfired, and he knows how to prepare for such occurrences. I suppose, Nick—eh?"

"You suppose what? Go on."

"I suppose that while you were in Olga's room, talking to her, you told her that you suspected that her father was not dead; eh? Did you tell her that you thought the whole thing was some sort of a plot?"

"I did."

"Well, she knew then that the jig was up. There wasn't any use, then, to play out this game to the end, and so the minute your back was turned she passed the word along to the others, and the whole bunch of them flew the coop. That's about the size of it."

"That's the way it looks to me now, Malet."

"But the mystery is, how did they get away?"

It was Nick's turn to laugh now.

"You have given these Russians credit for so much shrewdness, Malet, that you have forgotten to imbue

them with mechanical genius. If Dovanief is the genius you say he is, in the manner of planning and always leaving a loophole open for his escape in case his plans miscarry, it is quite likely that when they hit upon this idea they also prepared a way through the walls of this house, to liberty."

"The house couldn't have been built with any secret passages in it, could it?"

"Hardly that. But this part of the city was once a favorite resort for gamblers and other illegal houses. Many of them contained secret hiding-places, and where they required to have them, they were built into them. In those days they were almost all made on the same plan, and I think we will have no difficulty in finding—— *Look!*"

He had stepped forward, while he was talking, toward the marble mantel in the room lately occupied by Olga, and now he seized upon it and pulled sharply toward him.

At once one end swung outward from the wall, disclosing a narrow flight of steps that descended between the ceilings, so narrow that one was obliged to turn sideways in order to pass down them.

"I hear the officers at the lower door, Malet," said Nick rapidly. "Go to them. Put everything here in their charge, tell them all you know, and then wait outside on the steps for me. This will lead me out somewhere, but I want to know where, in order to get on the trail."

He passed down the narrow stairs, leaving the mantel door swinging open as he did so, and presently arrived at the cellar of the house; and here he discovered a table and a couch in one corner; a couch that was still warm from the pressure of a body upon it, and around it on the earthern floor were strewn the butts of innumerable Russian cigarettes, showing, Nick believed quite conclusively, that here was where the Russian had been waiting for the conclusion of affairs up-stairs.

But the cellar was empty now, and he turned about to discover the method of escape from that part of the building.

It had not even been concealed.

At the side of the cellar wall a rough deal door was swinging open, and here other stairs, wider than those already followed, led downward into dense darkness.

But Nick's electric torch was immediately forthcoming, and after a short descent he was rapidly traversing an underground passage that took him straight toward the building that fronted on the next street north.

The detective knew that the fugitives could not be very far ahead of him, for they had only the briefest start, and presently when he came out into another cellar and saw an outer door from it to the open air, standing ajar, he rushed out upon the street, and peered first one way and then another, in an eager effort to discover them.

The only thing he saw that attracted his attention in the least was a hack, which was driving rapidly toward the westward.

This was not a part of the city where hacks are common, save when there are funerals, and in such cases there is a string of them. The sight of the hack was suggestive, and even as the detective started forward in pursuit of it, he wondered if the plotters had seen so far ahead of them in their plans that they had engaged this vehicle to stand there near the cellar entrance to await them in case they should have use for it.

There could be no other explanation.

As Nick started ahead after the hack, the horses that drew it suddenly started away at a rapid trot, and now Nick felt assured that not only were the fugitives inside it, but that they had been watching for him and had seen him suddenly appear on the street.

An empty grocery-wagon was passing him at the moment, going in the same direction, and in an instant he leaped to the middle of the street and vaulted to the seat beside the boy who was driving, and then, without asking permission, he seized the reins from the hands of the lad, and the whip from the socket, and, plying the latter swiftly, he was soon dashing along the street in pursuit.

But the occupants of the hack had seen and understood this move, and now the hack-horses were whipped into a run until they wheeled around a corner and disappeared from view.

When Nick turned the corner, also, the hack was swaying from side to side as it dashed up the avenue, and now it kept on straight ahead, going as fast as the horses could run, but never once attempting to turn a corner.

Nick saw people run out into the street and attempt to stop the running horses, and he understood that the driver was endeavoring to create the impression that his horses were running away; and then he saw a policeman leap to the middle of the thoroughfare and seize the bridle of one of the horses.

He stopped it, too, although he was dragged a considerable distance; but he stopped the horses and the hack they were drawing, and when Nick drew up alongside of them the officer was still roasting the driver for his careless driving.

And then Nick Carter grinned at his own folly, for he saw instantly that he had been nicely fooled. There were no passengers in the hack. They had left it the moment it turned the corner and was lost to his sight, and no doubt they had stood aside, laughing at him, when he rushed past them in the grocery-wagon in full pursuit of the empty vehicle.

"Verily," he thought, with a smile, "I have to do with persons who are full of tricks."

There was nothing to do but to turn back, which he did, after giving the boy a substantial fee for the use of his horse and wagon.

Those who know Nick Carter best, know that he is as full of expedients as the rogues he has to chase from time to time, and it will be remembered that one of Nick's favorite habits was to call upon young boys to help him when he stood in need of the sort of help he wanted now.

When he discovered that the hack was empty, he returned at once to the corner where it had turned to get out of his sight, and then he looked up and down the street for a boy or a group of boys who might seem as if they had been there at the time the hack turned the corner.

He found such a group at the opposite side of the street from him; they were engaged in something that was suspiciously like "shooting craps"; but Nick paid no heed to that as he approached them, although they hastily gathered up the dice and were ready to escape the moment they realized that they were the objects of his attention.

"Boys," said the detective, "which one of you saw a hack come around that corner a moment ago?"

"We all saw it," replied one of them, jumping to his feet at once, and approaching the detective.

"It stopped near here somewhere, didn't it, for three people to get out of it?" continued Nick.

"Four."

"Eh? Did four people get out of it?"

"Yes, sir. Two men and two women."

"Do you know where they went, my lad?"

"Sure I know. I saw 'em."

"Where did they go?"

"They went into that house over there. That one with the high stoop; see?"

"Yes. Are you sure about it, my lad?"

"Sure thing. Of course I'm sure, sir. I *saw* 'em."

"They have not come out again, since they entered the house?"

"No, sir."

"Well, here is a dollar for you. You may treat your friends to soda-water, and take the change home to your mother."

He turned away when he gave the boy the dollar, but the voice of the lad called to him.

"Say, mister," he said, "if you're chasin' that lot, I know a way that mebby they got away from you. There is a way out uh that house besides the front way, and maybe they took it. Do you want me to go with you and show it to you?"

"Yes, my lad, I would be very grateful to you if you would do so."

"Wait here, fellers!" called the boy to his companions; and then he ran on ahead of the detective toward the house on the opposite side of the street.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXPERT ON THE TRAIL.

"I live in that house, mister," said the boy, when they were ascending the steps of the high stoop together. "That's how I happen to know all about it; and I saw them folks go into it because I knowed they didn't live there. They looked too swell to be goin' into a place like this one."

At the top of the steps they entered a hallway that ran straight through the building to the rear, where there was a door like the front one, and another flight of steps leading downward to the yard in the rear. This yard was flagged, and beyond it was a smaller house, standing on the same lot, it being what is known locally in New York as a "rear tenement."

The hallway, then, through the front house, was a thoroughfare for those who lived in the rear tenement, whenever they chose to make use of it as such; but behind the rear tenement there was a narrow alleyway which ran all the way across the block, connecting with the street at either end.

"I guess that lot jest went through the rear house into the alley and then skiddooed," remarked the boy shrewdly, as he led the way into the hall of the rear tenement.

"There is no doubt of that," replied the detective. "The thing for us to find out now is which way they turned after they passed the rear house into the alley."

"Come on, then, mister. We'll find 'em, somehow."

A man and a woman were standing in the alley, talking earnestly together, and they cast furtive glances toward Nick as he came into the alley; but the presence of the boy seemed to reassure them, for they smiled upon him.

"Say, Mag," said the precocious lad, "mebby you saw four swells comin' out uh here a minute 'r two ago; did you?"

"Sure," replied the woman. "Two men and two loidies; is that 'em?"

"Sure thing, Mag. Which way did they go?"

"The tall man and the young woman went that way, Jimmy, and the short man and the other woman went that way. Want 'em?"

"Yep."

"Who's that with you? A cop?"

But Jimmy did not deem it necessary to reply to this question, for Nick had already turned in the direction indicated as taken by the tall man and the young woman, and the lad hastened after him.

The boy's fleet legs soon brought him up alongside of the detective, and he gasped:

"Say, mister, if you're goin' to follow this pair, maybe I'd better take after the others. I think I can get trace of them, and if you say so I'll do it, if you'll tell me where to meet you afterward."

"Good, my lad! I will reward you, if you find them. Meet me in front of your house, where I found you just now. Wait there until I come and I will wait for you if I get there first. Do your best, my lad, for you are working for Nick Carter."

Nick turned away as he spoke, but he heard the boy give a quick gasp of amazement, and then the lad shouted after him:

"You betcher life I'll do my best! *Hully gee!*"

At the end of the alley some men were mixing mortar in the street and another was just finishing loading a hod with bricks which he was to carry to the workmen on the walls of a new building near-by. Nick paused for a moment.

"A tall man and a young woman came out of this alley a few moments ago," he said to one of the men. "Can you tell me which way they turned? I am very anxious to find them," and he jingled some change in his hand meanwhile.

One of the men pointed down the street and Nick tossed him half a dollar as he turned and sped away in the direction indicated.

His course took him directly back to the avenue near which the house of the murder was located, although he was now two blocks above it; but the detective did not doubt that the fugitives had some other place of retreat arranged for them near to the one they had so lately deserted. He believed that the two parties were now making for the same point, and that if the boy Jimmy succeeded in following his quarry, they would ultimately come together.

It was a very slight thing which gave him a clue to the direction he was to follow when he arrived at the corner, but slight things are usually the most important, after all.

As he reached the corner and came to a pause, casting about him for some way of deciding which course to pursue now, he saw on the corner above him an Italian bend forward and pick up a glove from the pavement. Instantly he crossed the street and asked the man to show him the glove, and at once he recognized it as one he had seen that morning among the débris that had been pulled from the bureau to the floor in the room of Olga Dovanief.

It was a worn glove, of little value—of none at all without its mate, and he handed it back to the Italian with a word of thanks. He understood, now, that, womanlike, she had not neglected to take her gloves with her when she decided so suddenly to escape from the house, but that she had not had an opportunity to pull them upon her hands; and here, in turning the corner, one of them had fallen from her grasp.

Possibly she was trying to put them on and had not thought it worth while to waste the time in pausing to recover the dropped glove. It would not occur to her that Nick Carter would have noticed that glove on her floor, sufficiently to recognize it when he should see it again.

But it was Nick Carter's business to let nothing escape

him, and he had the habit of noticing things so definitely that he remembered them.

A uniformed policeman was walking slowly toward the detective, down the avenue, twirling his stick in his hands. Nick stopped him.

"I am Nick Carter," he said. "A tall man, middle-aged, I should say, and a young woman, very beautiful, if you could see her face, passed this way less than ten minutes ago; less than five minutes, perhaps. I have not kept account of the time. Did you see such a pair? They were probably moving along as rapidly as they dared to go without actually running."

"Sure! I saw 'em! They went down that street, toward the river."

Nick dashed across the avenue and down the street the officer indicated. It was a long way to the river yet—several blocks, indeed—and the officer had mentioned it only to give the direction, of course.

The street, or rather, that one block of the street, happened to be practically deserted. It had been closed by the department, for repairs, and, therefore, there were no vehicles in sight along it; and only two or three pedestrians.

He had hoped that when he entered the street he would catch a sight of the fugitives, but he did not. They had made such good speed that either they had reached the next corner already or they had entered a house along the way.

At the next corner an old Irishwoman was attending a newspaper-stand, now littered with the first editions of the evening papers, although it was yet far from noon of the day. Nick took a paper and dropped a half-dollar into her hand, saying, as he did so:

"No change. Keep it. Have you seen a tall man and a young woman pass here, coming from the same direction I did? Not more than five or six minutes ago?"

"I did, sir."

"Which way did they go?"

"They took a car, sir, going down-town. It was the second one ahead of that one there, sir."

"Thank you. Who owns that bicycle that is leaning against the building behind you?'

"My son, sir. He tends to the stand for me part of the time. He is playing around the street somewhere now."

"Will you lend it to me? I am Nick Carter, the detective. Here is five dollars which you may keep, for the use of the wheel, and I will see that it is returned to you, besides. May I take it?"

"Sure ye can take it, sir; and without pay, too."

"Thank you; but keep the five. Put it in the bank for the boy, if you haven't other uses for it."

The detective had seized upon the wheel while he was talking, and already he had run it out to the curb and thrown his leg across it; and now he sped away after the second car in advance of the one that was already a block ahead of him.

Twice officers from the sidewalks called to him not to go so fast, but he sped onward, for all that.

The first car was passed at the second corner; the second car was overtaken and passed at the fourth corner; the third car—the car he wished to overtake, was four blocks still farther ahead of him; but he could see it now plainly, and he could see, also, when it stopped to let passengers off or on.

He was still half a block away from it when it came to a stop at a corner, and he saw the two persons he was following get down and walk rapidly away along the side street in front of them, toward the center of the city again. They were doubling on their trail, and doing it in the masterly manner of persons who are accustomed to being followed, and who are expert in throwing undesirable acquaintances off their tracks.

But Nick instantly recognized the straight and elegant figure of Olga Dovanief. She moved along with the grace and ease of a panther, and with something of the feline agility of one, too. There could be no mistaking her, even at that distance, having once seen her near-by; and Nick instantly slowed down the speed of his wheel, and moved cautiously after them.

It was no part of his intention to overtake and arrest them in the street. He preferred to trail them to their destination, for he did not doubt that they would ultimately lead him directly to the other two, from whom they had separated in the alley behind the rear tenement.

The man—Nick could see only his back, of course—seemed even at that distance and in that view to be a living and walking counterpart of the dead man in the back parlor of the house where the victim of the tragedy was lying. Without doubt he was Dovanief himself.

The detective released one hand from the handle-bars of the bicycle long enough to remove his hat, fold it, place it in one of his capacious pockets, and substitute in its

place a cap which he produced from another one. This he pulled closely down over his brows and then pedaled up quite close to the two fugitives.

Neither of them looked behind them.

No doubt they were positive that they had thrown the detective off their trail, and if mere expertness had been the criterion, they would have deserved such success as that.

But the detective was now close behind them. He had them in plain sight. He could have arrested them then, if he had cared to do so; but ahead of them somewhere were the other parties to the crime that had been committed that morning, and Nick Carter wanted to bag them all.

The two were walking along quite leisurely now, although by no means slowly; but they no longer traveled fast enough to attract attention to their movements.

At the next avenue they turned north again, and continued in that direction until they arrived at the very street where the crime had been committed, only they were a block to the east of it; and here they turned toward the very house itself, and Nick wondered if they would have the hardihood to approach very near to it.

But they did not.

They went into the street only a short distance, when they suddenly turned into a basement area, passed quickly through it, and entered one of the houses by the lower door, which must have been standing open to receive them, for when Nick arrived in front of the house and rode slowly past it, the iron grating in front of the basement door, under the stoop, was already tightly closed, and apparently locked.

And ahead of Nick, farther up the street, Nick saw little Jimmy running rapidly toward his home, having evidently also been successful in his trailing, and now on his way to report to Nick Carter. At all events, the mere sight of Jimmy running away from the house was sufficient to assure the detective that all four of the people he was pursuing were together again, having met in the house to which he had followed Olga and her father.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUSE WITH THE RED SHUTTERS—NICK CARTER'S BRAVEST ACT.

A mounted policeman was riding through the street toward Nick, and Nick pedaled the bicycle rapidly toward him so that they met some distance from the house. Nick held up his hand, and the mounted officer stopped instantly; and it happened that he was an old acquaintance of the detective's lately appointed to the force.

"Hello, Al; how are you?" he said.

"Hello, Nick. What brings you here?" was the quick reply.

"The usual thing. I have been trailing some people I want to capture. Have you got the sand to help me, Al? I think the two of us can do it. I would tackle them alone, only I fear that one or two of them might get away if I did."

"Sure, I'll help you."

"They're a bad lot, Al."

"I don't care for that."

"They will probably fight, and fight to kill, too."

"All the better. I'm spoiling for a fight, Nick."

"They are Russian nihilists, who are supposed to carry bombs and such things around in their clothes; and they have already committed one murder this morning."

"Where are they?"

"In that house with the red shutters."

"How many?"

"Four; two men and two women."

"Will the women count?"

"One of them will—unless I am greatly mistaken—more than both the men put together."

"Eh? She's a bad one, then."

"Yes. And young and beautiful, too. Will your horse stand, Al?"

"Till he rots, if necessary."

"Then leave him here. I'll put the wheel beside him. I think it will be safe till we return."

"How are you going to get into the house, Nick?"

"Pick the latch of the front door. It's the quickest, and the safest. We ought to find the four of them in one room, talking it over, and making arrangements for their further flight. I don't think they will be on the watch. I don't believe they have any idea that they were followed. We will walk along as if we intended to pass the house, and when we are at the bottom of the steps we will run up them as quickly as possible. Are you ready?"

"Sure."

"Got your gun handy?"

"Yes; and my stick, too."

"Come on, then."

The bicycle was left beside the horse, and the two men walked rapidly down the street until they were abreast of the house, and then they followed out the program arranged by the detective; that is, they ran quickly up the steps together, and as soon as they were at the top Nick inserted his picklock into the keyhole.

The door responded readily enough. It opened almost at his touch, as if he were provided with the regular key, and, followed closely by the officer, the detective entered the house.

They closed the door after them and stood there together in silence for a moment, listening.

At first they heard no sound; then, faintly, the murmur of voices came to them from the floor above, and Nick stepped forward cautiously toward the stairs.

The uniformed officer followed him, and in utter silence, taking care to tread upon the stairs close to the wall, where they were less likely to creak, they mounted them.

Twice as they ascended they paused to listen, and at last Nick was satisfied that the murmuring sound of voices proceeded from the rear room; he was convinced that the persons he sought were gathered there, discussing their plans and making ready for their next move.

Outside the door, when they reached the landing, they paused to listen; and Nick could now plainly hear the voice of Olga, who was speaking.

She was talking in Russian, which was, however, perfectly intelligible to the detective, and she uttered her words in that same cool, calm tone he had noticed about her when he conversed with her in the other house.

Translated into English, her words were:

"With all your natural shrewdness, my father, you can make the veriest fool of yourself of any person I have ever known. You might have foreseen that Nick Carter would not be deceived by any such trick as the one you sought to play. And now you are worse off than ever because you have broken the laws of the country where you had sought a refuge."

"Olga!" exclaimed a masculine voice sternly. "Stop! Remember that I am still your father, and that I will not submit to such words from you." It was evidently Ivan Dovanief who had spoken; but now the unmistakable tones of Prince Michael intervened.

"Olga," he said, "by my love for you——"

It was evident to Nick that she wheeled upon him and interrupted him before he could say more, for the detective heard her exclaim, with biting scorn in her voice:

"Michael Orloff, I have warned you many times; I warn you again now, and for the last time, that if you utter another word of your hateful love I will not hesitate to serve you as I did another of your stamp, who offended me in like manner. Attend to the business we have on hand, and do not address me again if you wish me to remain in this company. It is plain enough that not one of you is capable of making an escape without my help. I was a fool to stick to you for a minute, after I discovered that you had all lied to me. You know, every one of you, that if I had suspected that there was to be a murder committed, I would not have consented to any such proceeding."

"He was a spy—a spy of our own country," said her father apologetically.

"Bah!" she responded. "I care nothing for the man, or for his death. You should be assured of that already. Barganoff, the spy, is better dead than alive. It was his misfortune that he happened to look like you, my father. But you had no right to plan his murder without my knowledge, and to draw me into it as you have done. The foolish thing is that we are no longer safe in America—that the laws of this land have been broken."

"Well, anyhow, it was not I who drugged him and stabbed him," said her father.

"No. It was Michael. The whole plan was his; no?"

"Yes."

"Nick Carter did not believe that my mother and I told the truth when we said that two men entered our rooms and took us unawares—but that is exactly what you did. We could not guess that my father and my uncle would attack us and bind us and gag us and not condescend to explain their acts until after they had committed the outrage. We did not lie to that detective as much as he thought we did, although we did deceive him. But that doesn't help us in our escape, for escape we must, and at once."

It was at this moment that the detective threw open the door and confronted those in the room, while the uniformed policeman of the mounted squad stood directly behind him, ready to lend assistance the moment it was required.

When Nick threw the door open, those who were in the room wheeled in their tracks and faced him.

The countenance of Prince Michael was livid; that of

Dovanief was suffused with a rush of blood until it was almost purple; Madam Dovanief uttered a little scream of fright, and crouched almost to the floor. Olga alone did not lose her head, but turned coolly to face the intruders, at the same time withdrawing her hand from behind her skirts, and exhibiting to the view of the detective and his companion a round, lead-colored object that she held in her grasp. It was but little larger than an ordinary baseball, but Nick knew instantly that it was one of the deadly bombs in the use of which the Russians are so expert.

She regarded the detective coolly. She even smiled at him.

"If you come a step nearer to me, Nick Carter," she said in English, speaking with cool deliberation, "I will throw this bomb in your face, and we will all be killed together."

Nick stopped in his tracks. Who would not? He knew that she meant exactly what she said.

"That would be a foolish move on your part, Olga," he said, smiling back at her.

"Why?"

"Because you have no cause to kill yourself. I have just heard it said and almost proved that you had nothing personally to do with the death of Barganoff, as you call him, although I never heard of the man. You were an accessory after the fact, of course, but you will not be made to suffer very greatly for that."

She laughed in his face, at the same time raising the bomb aloft in her hand.

"Do you suppose that I am any the less the daughter of my father?" she asked. "Stand where you are! I have only to drop this to the floor to kill every person in the room and also wreck the house. Turn and leave the house as you entered it, or I will drop it."

Nick smiled at her without moving.

"Do you think I am so poor a specimen of a man as that?" he asked her, after a moment.

"You prefer death to retreat?" she asked.

"Infinitely; but I don't propose to suffer either one."

He had gathered himself for a leap forward while he was talking, and now he took the awful chance, in which he had but one in a thousand to escape alive.

He sprang toward her, the distance between them being not more than ten feet. He did not doubt that she would do as she had threatened, but he believed he could prevent the catastrophe, as you shall see.

She was true to her word.

As he leaped toward her, she released her hold upon the deadly bomb, which was in the air high above her head; and as she did so she took one quick step backward, as Nick had calculated she would do, in order that nothing should intervene between the bomb and the floor, where it would be exploded.

But Nick Carter, instead of leaping forward to seize Olga, had sought only to catch the bomb in his hands before it could strike the floor, and he made what a ball-player would call a splendid catch.

He threw himself forward and half-turned his body, so that when he struck the floor he was half upon his back; but his two hands were high in the air, and they held the deadly bomb safely.

Instantly he was upon his feet again, for he had calculated that the others of Olga's party would be for the moment so paralyzed by what was happening that they would be incapable of motion or action, and in this he was correct; for he stood facing them with the bomb in his grasp before any of them thought to do a thing.

Olga stepped forward instantly, then, stretching out both arms as she did so.

"I yield," she said, "to a brave man."

There was no thought of resistance left in the others. They were white to the lips, and incapable of speech, for there are no people in the world who fear a bomb so much as those who make deadly use of them; and one of those missiles in the hand of an enemy is a very different thing to holding it in your own possession.

* * * * * * *

That afternoon, when the prisoners had been taken to their cells and charges entered against them, Nick returned the wheel to the newsboy on the corner, from whose mother he had borrowed it; and he called upon Jimmy and made him a present of a new ten-dollar bill; and Jimmy, after thanking him, asked him:

"Is that dead straight, mister? Are you Nick Carter?"

"I am," replied the detective, smiling at the boy's enthusiasm. And Jimmy said:

"Gee whiz!"

THE END.

The next issue of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY (560) will contain, besides the usual sketches and departments, a complete long story entitled "The Nihilists' Second Move; or, Nick Carter's Timely Interference."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Robert W. Charles, Richmond, Va.—1. Yes. Nick Carter is known as a sailor, and has gone on many a long voyage. 2. Practise boxing the compass until you can rattle it off forward or backward.

Boys who live in seaport towns are sometimes asked if they can do this. If they can do it quickly and accurately it is considered that they will make good sailors. If they miss a point or can only do it slowly, they are said to be landlubbers who will never see blue water. To box the compass means to name all the points in order as fast as you can.

This is the way an old salt will rattle it off: No'th, nor' by east, nor-nor'east, nor'east by no'th, no'th-east, nor'east by east, east-nor' east, east by no'th, east, east by south, east-sou'east, sou'east by east, southeast, sou'east by south, sou'-sou'east, sou' by east, south, sou' by west, sou'-sou'west, sou' west by south, sou'west, sou'west by west, west-sou'west, west by south, west, west by no'th, west-nor'west, nor'west by west, nor'west, nor'-west by no'th, nor'-nor' west, nor' by west, no'th.

A sailor always pronounces north as though it had no letter "r" in it.

Can you remember it?

A cock crows at different times and for different reasons, but his morning vociferations, strange as it may appear, are really intended as a love-song to call the members of his harem from their slumbers. This has been proved by observation of those of his relations who are still in the state of nature. The peculiar, pungent freshness which pervades the air at the approach of dawn is supposed to specially excite the respiratory centers of the cock's brain, and the result of this stimulus is the crow. Cocks, like all other birds, are very sensitive to atmospheric changes, and almost any fluctuations will set then crowing. The crow of defiance or triumph is, of course, the expression of a mental and not a physical sensation.

To stop the leakage of a boat by the use of sawdust, appears at the first suggestion ridiculous. It is a common method, however, employed by backwoodsmen of the Adirondack region.

One day a party having considerable baggage, discovered upon unloading it into a scow at the end of the regular "carries," that the boat leaked badly. To delay for repairs would occasion considerable annoyance, and without repairs, to proceed seemed impossible.

At this juncture one of the guides said:

"I think I can fix it. Just unload the boat again."

This was done, and then the guide brought from a saw-mill near the spot a quantity of sawdust. This he sprinkled thickly upon the water on either side of the boat.

"Now," continued he, "load up again."

This was done, and when the weight again sank the boat, the influx of water through the sides and bottom sucked in the sawdust, which finally accumulated in the crevices, swelled under the action of the water, and actually stopped the leakage.

A surveyor on the east coast of Sumatra happened to be busy taking bearings through a telescope on a water parting in the mountains there, when suddenly a big tiger stood right in front of the instrument. A coolie, holding another instrument, rolled, from pure terror, head over heels into a neighboring ravine, and the other helpers fled, so that the surveyor was forced to face his foe alone. Unarmed as he was, and at a loss what to do, he seized his walking-stick and mechanically struck at the tiger, when, to his relief, the animal suddenly turned tail and disappeared in the jungle. On the west coast of Sumatra, on the road from Korinchi to the coast, tigers are said to have in a recent year killed sixteen travelers. For a while they even stopped the conveyance of coffee from the interior. The natives, it is added, dare not attack the tigers from superstitious motives. Once, when one of them was carried away out of an armed party, his companions "asked the tiger for mercy," and made no attempt to rescue. The Dutch Government, finding this superstitious dread so strong, has been compelled to content itself with building lofty and tiger-proof night shelters for travelers on the road.

One day, while a gentleman was watching the disgusting though fascinating operation of feeding a large cobra in the Zoological Garden at Calcutta, the master of an East Indiaman told him a remarkable story of a python in the old Jardin des Plantes, in Paris. The serpent was one of the largest specimens of its species ever captured. So muscular was it, so fierce and rapid in its deadly coiling, that it required six men to hold it, even when the head had been properly secured, on the few occasions when it was necessary to change its quarters.

The oldest animal-trainers and attendants had a wholesome dread of the hideous python. Live rabbits were the favorite food of the python. These were fattened specially for its table, and only the largest and most tempting were selected.

The python had now attained a length of nearly twenty-three feet, and year by year it had become more powerful and vindictive. Six thousand dollars had been offered for this snake, but it was valued at much more than this sum. The python, it might be said, was in the heydey of its fame.

One day a fine, white rabbit, plump and glossy, was placed in its cage. The snake, coiled luxuriously upon an Eastern rug, lazily lifted its head and calmly inspected the offering, as if to satisfy itself that it was in all respects fit for its repast. The poor rabbit was instantly overcome with terror.

It then stood up on its haunches, in the manner of a poodle begging to its mistress, and began pawing the air with its forelegs. Both the posture and the action were unnatural in the rabbit, and were evidently only caused by terror. The snake advanced slowly and cautiously, its gracefully curved neck thrust forward, its black forked tongue darting in and out of its mouth,

until its head was within a foot of the rabbit. The latter beat the air still more violently.

It was pitiful. The beautiful white rabbit, its pink eyes starting from its head with terror, seemed to be trying to shut out the awful sight. The python was evidently perplexed, and its perplexity turned to fright. The cowardice of all large serpents is well known. This one had never heard a rabbit utter such cries, nor seen one act in such a manner. After gazing at it for a few moments it slowly withdrew toward the other side of the compartment.

As the snake retreated, the rabbit, probably crazed by terror, sprang forward, and, in another instant, had bitten the python in the neck just behind the head, its most vulnerable spot. The rabbit then hopped back to the farther extremity of the cage. The python, so suddenly and unexpectedly attacked, had not tried to defend itself, and could not be prevailed upon again to approach its naturally timid foe.

The latter was taken from the cage, and, in view of its heroic defense of its own life, was allowed to live in happiness—according to the ideas of rabbits—until its death from natural causes. Four days afterward the python died, not, the physicians said, from the immediate effects of the bite, but from gangrene.

An elephant was close to him. There was no time to wait, if the hunter was to get a shot. The beast was on the move, and the dust flew from his side as the heavy ball struck him.

Screaming angrily, he turned full front in the direction of the tree by which the hunter stood, motionless. For a moment they confronted one another, and then the rumbling note of alarm uttered by his companions decided him on joining them. The sportsman regained the path, and rode along the line of their retreat, which, as shown by the yielding bush, was parallel to it.

After a time the thorns thinned out, and he caught sight of the wounded elephant holding a course of his own a little to the left of his fellows; and when he entered the tropical forest beyond the hunter was in his wake, and was very soon compelled to follow where he broke a way.

A little extra noise from the pursuer caused the pursued to stop; and while clinging to the horse and peering at the huge animal, the man saw him suddenly put his head where his tail ought to have been. The trunk was tightly coiled. Forward flapped the huge ears, up went the tail, and down he came like a gigantic bat ten feet across.

Pinned above and on each side, by dismounting, the hunter could hope neither to escape nor to kill his opponent. He, therefore, turned his unfortunate horse round, and urged him along. The elephant thundered straight through obstacles which the pursued were obliged to go round, and in fifty yards they were fast in a thick bush, and he within fifteen feet of them.

As a last chance the man tried to get off, but in rolling round in the saddle his spur galled the horse's flank, and the elephant screaming over him at the same moment, he made a convulsive effort and freed himself. That deposited the man in a sitting position immediately in front of the uplifted forefoot of the charging elephant.

So near was it that the hunter opened his knees to allow him to put it down, and, throwing himself back, crossed his hands upon his chest, and obstinately puffed himself out with the idea of trying to resist the giant tread. He saw the burly brute from chest to tail as he passed directly over him lengthways, one foot between his knees and one fourteen inches beyond his head, and not a graze! Five tons at least!

Out of all narrow escapes this was the only one that remained with him in recollection for any time. One hears of nightmares. Well, for a month or more this gentleman surely had night-elephants.

THE BURGLARY AT SAKONNET.

"So you want a job?"

"Yes, sir."

"What can you do?"

"I'll do anything that's honest to earn my living. You just try me, sir."

Mr. Kaspar, the proprietor of the Sakonnet House, stroked his chin thoughtfully as he gazed into the upturned face of the youth. The hotel was crowded, even thus early in the season, and Mr. Kaspar had engaged about all the help he thought he should need in all departments.

But he liked the looks of Bob Gaylor. He appeared honest, he was dressed neatly, and he certainly was in earnest.

"I don't know of anything you can do but wash dishes," the hotel proprietor finally said. "We are in need of a dish-washer in the kitchen."

"I'm your man, then," Bob declared firmly. "I've been traveling in search of work for two months, and this is the first offer I've had of steady employment. I'm ready to turn to at once."

"Stay a moment," Mr. Kaspar observed. "How came you to walk so far? Where is your home?"

"My home *was* in Brampton—a hundred miles or more from here," responded Bob, with a choke in his voice. "But I have none now. Father died in March—consumption. The selectmen undertook to have me bound out to a mean old curmudgeon of a farmer. So I ran away."

"You ran away?"

"Well, strictly speaking, I *walked* away. I have had a pretty good education, and don't like farmwork. I knew that Old Miles, the man who wanted me, would make me a regular slave."

"How much better than farming is dish-washing in a summer hotel, do you suppose?" asked Mr. Kaspar, with a smile.

"At least, I'm my own master, to a certain extent." Bob responded. "I hope you don't think any the worse of me for leaving Brampton?"

"Oh, I guess you'll do," returned the hotel-keeper. "Four dollars per week and found is what I'll give you. You can go around to the kitchen now and let Caleb set you to work."

Bob obeyed the mandate thankfully, and set to work with so much willingness that even grouty Caleb Cranshaw, the chief waiter, was favorably impressed by the new dish-washer.

He found the position no sinecure at the Sakonnet House. The hotel was the largest at the resort, and was always well patronized. But he might have had a far more uncomfortable place in which to work.

The sink-room was, of course, at the extreme rear, yet it was almost over the water as well. An arm of the wide inlet made up back of the hotel, and the sink-room was on the very edge of this smaller inlet. And the salt sea breeze ever blew in across the dunes, and cooled the heated, steaming atmosphere of the kitchen.

There was a narrow, closetlike room opening out of the sink-room just large enough for a cot. The very first day Bob, who was desirous of saving all of his modest wages possible, made arrangements to sleep in this box-like apartment. It was not nice, but it was cheap, and

the youth well knew that when fall should come he would again be out of a job.

To a fellow who had been well brought up, and had received a good education, the majority of the employees of the hotel were not pleasant associates. Perhaps Bob stood aloof rather too much, owing to this fact, for the men employed about the kitchen began to call him "uppish," and declared that he was too big feeling for his position.

Not intentionally did Bob gain their ill-will; but soon, from Cranshaw, who was a beetle-browed, scarred-faced man, to the cook's assistants, they openly showed their dislike for the youth. He did not mind this in most of them, but it caused Cranshaw to vent a great deal of his natural spleen upon him, and this Bob found hard to bear.

He soon discovered, also, several things which would have doubtless filled Mr. Kaspar, the hotel proprietor, with unbounded surprise. The hotel office and the hotel kitchen were too far apart for the owner to closely overlook the actions of his employees in the latter department, and Bob plainly saw that Caleb Cranshaw was actually robbing his employer every day.

His thievery was of a petty order—a dozen of eggs at one time, half a box of oranges at another, and so on. Many things were supposedly ordered and paid for that never reached the hotel, and each day a man, who was as villainous-looking as Caleb himself, and a fit mate for him, came with a wagon and carried a good many dollars' worth of provisions away that might have easily been turned in to the account of the running-expenses.

Bob was strongly tempted to give Mr. Kaspar a hint of these proceedings, but he did not know how to approach the subject, neither did he fancy gaining the name of "tale-bearer."

Affairs reached a climax, however, one night in July. Bob had been two months at the hotel, and the season was now at its height. From early morning till dark he was upon his feet, and was only too ready to crawl into his cot and go to sleep.

It was a stormy night. All day the breakers had thundered on the bar outside Saknonet Inlet, and occasionally fitful dashes of rain knocked for entrance at the narrow window of Bob Gaylor's small room.

And some of the raindrops gained admittance, too. Some time after midnight a tiny stream of water worked its way through a crack and commenced to drop with steady accuracy upon the upturned face of the sleeping boy.

Bob began to dream that he was in swimming, and that icebergs had been put to soak in the water previous to his taking a bath. This impression became so strong at last that, in seeking to get out of the water, he suddenly got out of bed, bowbeit in a very undignified manner, and awoke on the floor.

"Great Scott! how that hurt!" he groaned.

Then he stopped and listened breathlessly. There was the noise of muffled footsteps in the kitchen without, and the yellow light of a lantern cast a narrow beam beneath the door of his little bedchamber. Bob arose to his feet softly, throwing aside the bedclothes which had accompanied his sudden fall from the couch, and crept softly to the door.

Three men were making a hasty meal at one of the kitchen dressers, and although their faces were turned from him, the boy recognized all three. They were Caleb Cranshaw, the head waiter or steward, the man before mentioned who each day came to the hotel for the refuse, and the third was the clerk of the Sakonnet House himself, a smoothly shaven young fellow of not more than twenty-five.

The night lunch which Caleb had evidently prepared for his companions included the best the house afforded, not only in the line of eating, but in that of drinking. The clerk, however, whose name was Harlowe, seemed either too nervous or excited to eat.

"Come, you fellows, hurry up," he muttered impatiently. "These night feeds have spoiled more than one good job for better men than we."

"Don't croak," sneered Caleb, in his harsh voice. "We're safe enough. There's nobody within hearing but that confounded boy, and he's fast asleep. I'll just look in at him."

"Well, come on. I've got enough," said the third man, wiping his bearded lips on a napkin. "We've a long row before us. I don't myself believe that there's any necessity for this trip to Blue Hills."

"No, you fool," growled Caleb. "You'd run your neck right into a noose. We can lay low at Blue Hills for a day, and then take train to New York after the first rush is over. Come on."

They turned away from the dresser and approached the door, and then for the first time Bob Gaylor saw that each of the trio carried a large carpetbag. They went out at once, and the boy, not fully understanding the situation, hurried into his clothes and followed them.

The men went straight to the shore, where a boat was drawn up. It was one of the hotel boats—Bob saw that at a glance, for he knew them all. Evidently it belonged to the decamping trio. He couldn't think, for the life of him, why the clerk and Caleb should leave the hotel without giving Mr. Kaspar notice; and to sneak off in this manner, too.

But while he was trying to explain this, Bob had been thoughtless of his footsteps, and suddenly he fell prostrate over a bait-tub which lay overturned on the shore.

"Perdition!" ejaculated Cranshaw, and springing back from the water's edge, he fell upon Bob before he could rise.

"Who is it?" gasped Harlowe, hastening up, while the third man pushed the boat off hurriedly, holding it by the bow to the shore.

"It's that whelp, Gaylor!" Cranshaw exclaimed, through his clenched teeth, and with his hand on poor Bob's throat.

"Kill him!" whispered the third man from his station by the boat.

But Harlowe rolled up a glove and thrust it as far as possible into the boy's mouth, tying it in with his handkerchief. Then it took but a moment to trice up his hands and feet.

When this was done Harlowe and Cranshaw stood up and looked at each other. Both were breathing heavily, and the clerk was as pale as a sheet.

"Nice mess, this," growled the third man. "Why didn't you stick him?"

"Shut up!" returned Caleb impolitely. "Nobody asked *your* advice."

Then he went a few steps along the strand and shoved off a second boat—a leaky, shaky old tub, belonging to some fisherman.

"What ye goin' to do?" demanded the third man fierce-

ly. "Don't you go to makin' this a losin' game. I'll have your life, Caleb Cranshaw, if you do."

Cranshaw went up to him, still retaining the long line of the boat in his hands.

"The boy shall be put in this boat," he said, with cruel distinctness. "He's tied hand and foot. The tide is going out. In half an hour he'll be over the bar—providing that old hulk floats that long, with nobody to bail it out."

Then he motioned to Harlowe to raise Bob's feet, and together they placed him on his back in the bottom of the old boat. Getting into their own they towed the second craft with its helpless burden out into the inlet, and there let it go.

"So much for spying," Cranshaw exclaimed exultantly, as he turned the head of his own boat up the inlet.

The old shell, taking water like a sieve, was carried swiftly in the opposite direction by the tide. Bob was lying in a puddle of water and the moisture gathered rapidly.

But the villains who had set young Gaylor adrift had forgotten the general trend of the current toward what was known as the "Lower Point." At the Lower Point was an old, unused wharf, built so low that at high tide the water usually was on a level with the flooring, and often, as in storms, was a foot or more above the pier.

Toward this the old boat drifted, and was soon bumping her shaky nose against the piles. It was a lonesome spot, and even if Bob had been able to cry out, his voice would probably have been unheard.

Finally, the old boat, as though that was just what she had been searching for, pushed her way between the piles underneath the wharf, and, swinging about broadside, floated up against the lower piles and there stopped. The supports of the wharf were so close together at this outer side that there was little opportunity for the craft to find her way out.

Meanwhile, Bob was in an agony of apprehension. Not only for his own life was he fearful, but he now realized that the three men who had placed him in his present position must have had some strong reason for their action. They had committed some crime at the hotel, which was of such a serious nature that every witness of their flight must be put out of the way.

Struggling seemed to make no impression whatever on his bonds, and his jaws ached so from the presence of the gag that the tears were fairly forced from his eyes. He knew when the tide ceased running out, for the boat stopped bumping against the wharf supports, and lay still for some time. Suddenly he was aroused by feeling a jar on the other side. The tide had turned and had floated the boat to the upper side of the pier. But it did not find its way out between the piles.

It was growing light by this time. The rain had long since ceased, and by the rapidity with which the light increased Bob thought that it would be a fair day; but the breakers still boomed upon the bar outside, and the tide would doubtless rise higher than commonly.

This thought suddenly smote across his mind, and the cold perspiration started out all over him. The tide was rising, he was beneath the old wharf, and as the water rose it would probably force the old boat down, and he would be drowned!

There was no hope for him; not an atom. Nobody would suspect his presence beneath the wharf, and he would die there like a rat in a trap. It was a dreadful thought!

Bob struggled madly with his bonds. He put every ounce of energy he possessed into his muscles, but the rope held like iron bands. Exhausted, he sank back into the water, which was now nearly half a foot deep in the boat's bottom, and gave himself over to despair.

Brighter and brighter grew the day without, and inch by inch the water rose. Never before had he loved the darkness so much that he hated to see the day appear.

With terrible surety the water gained. Soon the old boat was bumping against the timbers overhead. He could almost believe that the air beneath the wharf was becoming close and oppressive.

Sudden, violent death would have been easier to bear, so it seemed to Bob Gaylor, than this slow progress toward an inevitable end. He writhed in the boat's bottom, the shaky old hulk jarring about among the piles and hitting against the beams overhead as though endowed with sudden life.

Suddenly the boy heard, above the lapping of the waves, a footstep upon the loose boards of the old wharf. Somebody was coming down toward the end of the pier—a fisherman, likely. Oh, should he have to die with help so near?

The man came on and stood almost directly over his position. Oh, for the ability to make one cry! Yet he was as helpless as though he had been born dumb. Then a thought flashed through his mind.

He gathered his failing strength for one supreme effort, and, lying as he was, flat upon his back, began to kick with his bound feet against the wharf boards.

The faint "rat-tat" sounded hardly louder than the lapping of the water, yet it was heard by the fisherman. Again it was repeated, and rushing hastily to the side of the wharf from whence it sounded loudest, the man wrenched up a loose board.

Another moment and he had dragged the gagged and bound youth from his perilous position. And not an instant too soon was it done, for, with a great wrenching and giving way, the rotten old boat sank below the surface.

As soon as he could speak after the gag was removed from his mouth, Bob told where he was from and how he came in his terrible predicament. An hour later he was telling the story to Mr. Kaspar in the office of the hotel, to which his rescuer had at once rowed him.

The Sakonnet House was in an uproar. During the night the safe had been opened and valuables belonging to the house and its guests to the value of fully ten thousand dollars had been taken, besides nearly half as much more in cash. Harlowe, Cranshaw, and Bob himself were missing, and on them suspicion had of course at once fallen.

Fortunately, what little he had overheard the burglars say enabled Bob to give the detectives the first real clue they had obtained, and that noon the trio of scamps were caught as they attempted to board the New York train at Blue Hills, fifteen miles up the inlet.

Every penny of their booty was recovered, too, and poor Bob, who had suffered so much, was not forgotten by the grateful guests of the hotel. Better still, he was assured of Mr. Kaspar's good opinion and of the fact that as long as the Sakonnet House stood in its present owner's hands, he would have a steady position in it.

In fact, the very next year he was placed in the treacherous Harlowe's position, and if you go to Sakonnet this summer, you will find him behind the clerk's desk.

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